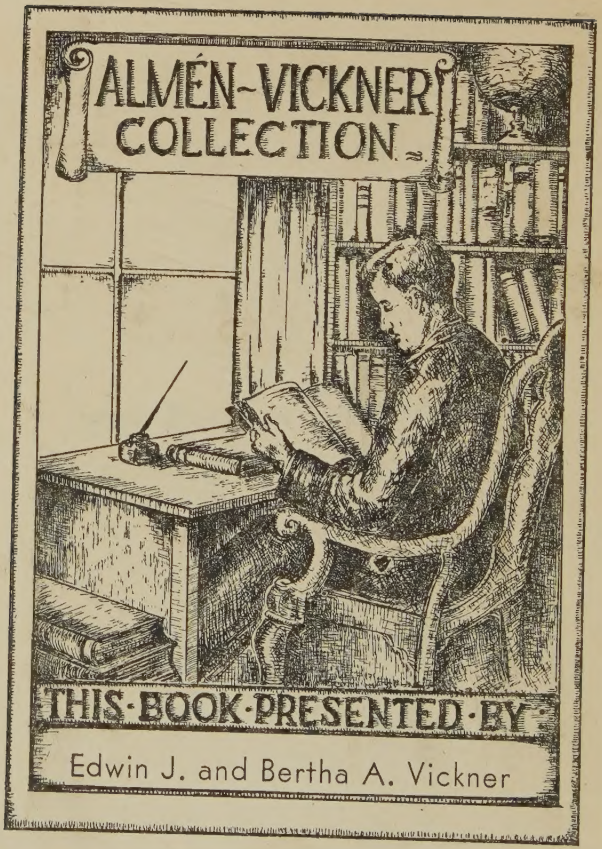
MODERN PLAYS

FREEDOM

ALFRED SUTRO



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FREEDOM

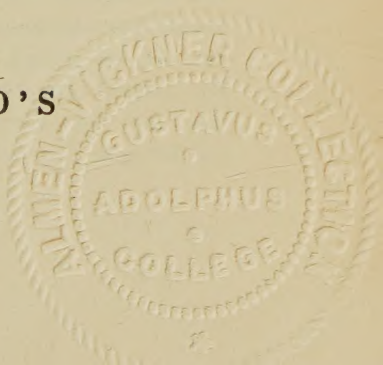
FREEDOM

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY

ALFRED SUTRO

NEW YORK
BRENTANO'S
1916



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FOREWORD

THIS play, at which I had been working for over a year, was finished in July 1914, a few days before the war broke out. It was to have been produced by Mr. Granville Barker, and to follow *The Great Adventure*. When that moment arrived, the Germans were at the gates of Paris —and it was obviously not the time to put upon the stage a play which dealt exclusively with questions of sex. That time seems far distant—and, when it has come, the conditions, the environment, will be no longer the same as when the play was written.

Perhaps one of the most definite results of the vast upheaval that is shaking the world's foundations will be the development it will have brought about in the character, as well as in the position, of women. Before the war, the most eager and ardent among them were concerned with problems such as those with which this little play deals; those problems have become, and will continue, secondary, although not losing their importance, which must ever remain acute. During the last two years, women have given proof of such heroism and devotion, they have so magnificently, and with such superb acquiescence and mastery of self, accepted the

burdens which fell most heavily upon them, that it seems almost an impertinence to publish a play in which they are shown concerned merely with one minor issue, struggling for a freedom that affects themselves alone. Were I writing the play to-day, and dealing with the same theme, I would have conceived a different class of woman —the one whom events have revealed to us, as also to herself, as complete mistress of her destiny. But the play stands, and cannot be rewritten; and, with all its imperfections upon it, it may yet possess some trifling value as an indication of the conditions that obtained before the war.

ALFRED SUTRO

LONDON, *July* 1916

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

BARTLEY CHAMBERS
LAURENCE TARGILL
RUTHERFORD COLLINS
TOBY PARNING
BALDERTON
MIRIAM CHAMBERS
EVE TARGILL
AGNES BELL
FANNY COLLINS

The time is the present. The action of the play passes within twenty-four hours, the scene being rooms in the CHAMBERS'S *house in Upper Berkeley Street, and the offices of "Manhood," a weekly paper, in Henrietta Street.*

NOTE. The Stage Directions in this book are conceived from the point of view of the audience, and must, therefore, be reversed by the actors performing the play.

ACT I

The dining-room at BARTLEY CHAMBERS'S *house in Upper Berkeley Street. It is a conventional, square-shaped room on the ground floor; windows, heavily curtained on the left, fireplace on the right, door at back, opening direct on to a smallish hall. The room is comfortable, pleasant enough in its way, with nothing strikingly original in its decoration or appointments, and no specially feminine touches. There is heavy modern furniture against the walls, which are distempered in a bluish green; on these hang two or three rather dark pictures of the Royal Academy order. On a sideboard are the usual pieces of silver, on a side-table the usual flowers—in fact, the room, while by no means unattractive, is precisely of the kind to be found by the hundred in the houses of well-to-do folk in the West End.*

Eight people have just finished dinner, and are seated at an oblong table, two at each end, two at the sides. MIRIAM CHAMBERS *and* LAURENCE TARGILL *are at the back,* LAURENCE *at* MIRIAM'S *right; next to him* AGNES BELL *and then* RUTHERFORD COLLINS; *next to him, and facing* MIRIAM *and*

LAURENCE, EVE TARGILL *and* BARTLEY—*then* FANNY COLLINS *and* TOBY PARNING. *It is a fair-sized table, and there is a bit of a gap at both ends; the people are all sitting in little groups, having shifted their chairs after dinner.*

BARTLEY CHAMBERS *is a handsome, sturdy man of forty, with a frank, open face, and a particularly attractive voice and smile.* LAURENCE TARGILL, *is about the same age—a long, thinnish man, rather ugly, but with a curious, uncouth charm about him, arising from his very marked personality. His face is strikingly intellectual, a trifle dominating and arrogant, perhaps, but with an occasional sincere and captivating smile and a look in the eye that are intensely winning.* RUTHERFORD COLLINS *is short, and inclined to be stout. He is distinctly of the bon-vivant order—a clever face, with a mouth that is half sensuous and half cynical.* TOBY PARNING *is the oldest of the party—nearer fifty than forty. He is a lawyer, but shows few signs of his profession in his face, which is long and thoughtful, kindly and humorous. His black hair is grey at the temples; he, alone of the men, wears a moustache and a closely cut beard.* MIRIAM *is a strikingly handsome woman of thirty-two or three, with a superb figure. Her face, in repose, seems somewhat cold and passionless, but lights up curiously when she speaks, or becomes interested in what other people are saying.* AGNES BELL *is about the same age,*

but looks older. She is a stately woman, and very handsome—but evidently attaches meagre importance to her appearance—in contra-distinction to the other ladies, who are charmingly gowned, her dress is almost austere, with a striking absence of any attempt at ornament. FANNY COLLINS *is pretty, in a rather common way. She is a little common herself—and, especially when addressing her husband, inclined to be waspish.* EVE *is the youngest of the party—twenty-eight or twenty-nine, and looking even less. She is slight, and very fair —meek and curiously retiring. With a little more vivacity and expression she would be exquisitely pretty—she has wonderful eyes, large and lustrous —but these are usually veiled, or only half-opened, and rarely allowed to convey much of what passes within her. The men are all wearing conventional evening clothes; the ladies, while distinctly avoiding the austerity of* AGNES, *still have their dresses cut a little higher than is the prevailing fashion, and do not subscribe to the frivolous eccentricities of the moment.*

As the curtain rises, there is a buzz of talk, in which all are joining, each with his neighbour. The butler and two maids have cleared the table, leaving coffee-cups and wine and liqueur glasses; a decanter of port has been placed by the side of BARTLEY, *who sends it round.* RUTHERFORD *and* BARTLEY *are smoking cigars,* TOBY *a cigarette—* LAURENCE *does not smoke, nor do any of the*

ladies. FANNY *would have dearly liked a cigarette, but she is afraid to take one, as none of the other women are smoking. It has evidently been a very pleasant dinner, and all the guests have enjoyed themselves, and are feeling jolly. The servants go, and shut the door. Suddenly* TOBY PARNING, *who has been talking eagerly with* FANNY *and* MIRIAM, *says,* "Let's ask BARTLEY. BARTLEY!" BARTLEY *apologizes to* EVE, *and pushes his chair round the corner, to the side of* FANNY, *and speaks across her, to* TOBY *and* MIRIAM. EVE *moves her chair a little nearer to* RUTHERFORD—*he turns from* AGNES, *whom he has been trying to convince, and whispers to her; she shakes her head doubtfully. Suddenly he gets on his legs. Though he has evidently always acquiesced in the butler's filling his glass, he is perfectly steady and self-possessed.*

RUTHERFORD. Ladies and Gentlemen!

[*There is a chorus of disapproval from all, except* EVE *and* AGNES, *who are in the secret—and they are doubtful. The rest all turn towards* RUTHERFORD, *and protest vigorously, shouting* "No, no! No speeches! Sit down!"

RUTHERFORD. [*Quite unperturbed.*] Women and Men!

[MIRIAM, TOBY, LAURENCE *and* BARTLEY *maintain their protest, crying* "We don't *want* any speeches! There shan't *be* any

speeches! EVE *and* AGNES *look on and smile*—FANNY *is indifferent.* MIRIAM *throws a lump of sugar at him.*]

RUTHERFORD. Though you strike you shall hear me! To-day happens to be the first anniversary of Bartley's becoming Editor—and also Proprietor—of that highly intellectual journal known to the world as *Manhood!*

[*The five, who are not in the secret, turn to each other in surprise.*

BARTLEY. By Jove! What is to-day?

TOBY. The 25th of September! He's right!

MIRIAM. Still, that's no reason! No, Rutherford, no! please!

BARTLEY. Of course! Sit down, Rutherford! Sit down!

RUTHERFORD. [*Blandly, as he takes a puff at his cigar.*] I refuse.

LAURENCE. [*Laughing.*] We all know how eloquent you are! But obey your hostess!

FANNY. He simply can't miss a chance of——

TOBY. Down you go, Rutherford!

RUTHERFORD. [*Turning on him.*] Silence, Man of Law! And be quiet, the rest of you! I mean to——

MIRIAM. Don't! To oblige me! Please!

AGNES. [*Appealing to her.*] Miriam dear—after all! We *ought* to drink Bartley's health!

MIRIAM. Then, my dears, drink it in silence! Bartley—— [*She turns to him.*

BARTLEY. Yes, yes—quite right! Laurence, pass him the port! Drink, Rutherford—and sit down!

[LAURENCE *offers the decanter*—RUTHERFORD *waves it aside, with a magnificent gesture.*

RUTHERFORD. We are all modest folk—I more than any [*ironical applause round the table*], and only a strong sense of duty retains me in this perpendicular position.

MIRIAM. [*Laughing.*] At least get it over quickly, Rutherford!

RUTHERFORD. I will be brief as—gratitude; I will be short—as my wife's temper! [FANNY *puts her tongue out at him.*] Ladies and Gentlemen! This is our anniversary. Twelve months ago, to a day, Bartley, our friend Bartley, forswore the delights of Workmen's Dwellings and Garden Cities—and joined us!

ALL. [*Except* MIRIAM *and* BARTLEY, *applauding loudly.*] Hear, hear!

RUTHERFORD. We, the rest of us around this table, were then engaged, as we had been for years, in educating the people. We had at our head that distinguished novelist and man of letters Mr. Laurence Targill——

ALL. [*Applauding loudly.*] Hear, hear!

[LAURENCE *bows and waves his hand to them.*

RUTHERFORD. —who, from the very beginning, had conducted the destinies of our weekly oracle. Ladies and Gentlemen, under Laurence's control that weekly might also have been spelt with an "a."

AGNES. [*Eagerly.*] No, no—I deny that! The paper may not have paid—it didn't—but the work was being done, the foundation-stone laid! It was!

RUTHERFORD. [*Turning to her.*] Agnes Bell—Doctor of Science, Bachelor of Arts, and Spinster of All the Graces——

AGNES. [*Half annoyed and half amused.*] Look here, Rutherford——

RUTHERFORD. [*Turning to the others.*] —still has enough of the primitive female in her—to pluck unripe conclusions from an unfinished proposition.

TOBY. [*Laughing.*] Then finish it, my lad! Get on!

RUTHERFORD. I *am* getting on, old Toby of Lincoln's Inn! Heaven, a lawyer rebuking delay!

TOBY. Never mind me! Vorwaerts!

[*There are cries of* "Yes, yes—get on!" *He proceeds blandly, with an occasional puff at his cigar.*

RUTHERFORD. Weakly we were, I repeat, in the sense of having a—defective circulation. We made a mighty noise, but there were mighty few to hear us! Then Bartley came along. Circumstances had made Bartley a merchant; marriage and Miriam had turned him into a philanthropist; but, in the packing-room of Heaven, or wherever they contrived the elements of the Bartley that was to be, "Editor" was most certainly labelled on his soul! Our journal has always possessed contributors of extraordinary talent——

ALL. [*Laughing and applauding.*] Hear, hear!

RUTHERFORD. Now it rejoices in an Editor and Proprietor who has made it pay——

BARTLEY. [*Beaming.*] Not quite—but almost! Very nearly! Yes!

RUTHERFORD. And that—there is no other word for it—is SUBLIME!

ALL. [*Loudly.*] Hear, hear! Hear, hear! Bartley, Bartley! [BARTLEY *smiles happily at them.*

RUTHERFORD. [*After another puff at his cigar.*] Ladies and Gentlemen, one word more, and I have done. Our motto, on the first page of our journal, was "Don't Be Respectable—but Respect Yourself," and to that motto we have clung. We are Politicians without Party, Enthusiasts without Fads, Moralists without Conventions. [*Applause.*] We attack folly and superstition without respect for persons, be they princes, priests, prime ministers, professors, or merely prigs. We are also, and have been from our origin, Champions of the Rights of Women.

ALL. [*Applauding more loudly than ever.*] Hear, hear!

RUTHERFORD. We have become—more particularly under Bartley's guidance—Champions of their Equal Rights.

[*The applause, especially from* LAURENCE *and the women, grows wilder than ever. He looks round, with a mischievous smile.*

RUTHERFORD. I repeat, their equal rights. We demand—Bartley started us on that, with Miriam

perhaps nudging his elbow—Absolute Equality between the sexes. And why not? Water is for ever rolling under bridges, and we are aware that the New Woman of five years ago is as obsolete to-day as the primitive motor-car that, as it crawled along, had to be preceded by a man with a red flag.

[AGNES *grows restive, shakes her head, and whispers to* LAURENCE *and* MIRIAM.

RUTHERFORD. The red flag is gone—we helped in its going—as it is largely our doing that woman is ever becoming Newer and Newer.

[*There are murmurs of discontent from* AGNES, MIRIAM, LAURENCE—AGNES *crying*, "Not at all! No! She doesn't!" RUTHERFORD *ignores the interruption, and continues more blithely than ever.*

RUTHERFORD. We, the men, follow her breathlessly —and meekly provide—the thunder for her lightning. We have grievances of our own—as I speak, my linen collar chafes and irritates me—but it is safe to presume that, generations hence, men will still be wearing linen collars—though what women will wear Heaven only knows—and we shall have helped them to wear it! And with that, Ladies and Gentlemen, I invite you to drink the health of Bartley Chambers—and also ask Mr. Parning to pass the port.

[*He sits, cheerfully, amidst signs of general disapproval.* AGNES, FANNY, *and* LAURENCE *all jump up together.*

AGNES. I want to——

LAURENCE. I can't allow——

FANNY. I'd just like——

[*These remarks are simultaneous. The three stop and look at each other.*

MIRIAM. [*Laughing.*] Good people!

RUTHERFORD. [*With a chuckle, as he reaches for the decanter.*] Dear me! Have I said anything——?

FANNY. [*Stingingly.*] You know very well that you've been——

RUTHERFORD. Well, they can't all speak at once! I vote for Agnes first.

MIRIAM. No, no; we've had enough! [*She appeals to* AGNES.] It's only Rutherford's little way!

AGNES. [*Who has been whispering to* LAURENCE, *who nods, and sits down.*] I really would like—just one word.

RUTHERFORD. Let her, dear hostess! And the others after! why not? [*He bangs the table.*] Silence for Agnes! [*He fills his glass.*

FANNY. [*As she sits, with a significant glance at the decanter.*] I say, Rutherford——

RUTHERFORD. [*Blandly.*] Admirable wine, dear—admirable. [*He shouts.*] Agnes!

AGNES. [*Nervously.*] Ladies and Gentlemen——

[TOBY *whispers to* MIRIAM.

RUTHERFORD. [*Banging the table, and assuming the tone of a toastmaster.*] Pray, silence for Agnes Bell, Doctor of Science and Bachelor of Arts!

AGNES. [*Turning to him.*] It's *you* whom I want to be silent, Rutherford.

RUTHERFORD. As the grave!

[*He tosses off his glass.*

FANNY. [*To* TOBY.] He's drinking too much.

RUTHERFORD. Sh, sh!

AGNES. I hate getting up and talking—not that I mean I do, as a general rule! Heaven knows I've done enough of it! But Rutherford has said things —that I don't like.

RUTHERFORD. Woe is me!

AGNES. He means well, of course—and, as Miriam says, I know it's only his way—and, in common with every woman, I'm gratefnl to him for the articles he writes, and has written——

RUTHERFORD. Hear, hear!

AGNES. And Bartley and Miriam know how grateful I am to *them*. But I hate the idea that, just to-night, when we're drinking to Bartley, thanking Bartley—anything should be said that—that—oh, I mean, that throws back to the old style of talk about men and women. Because that's odious to me—and is, I'm sure, to us all.

ALL. [*Loudly, except* RUTHERFORD.] Hear, hear!

RUTHERFORD. [*Filling his glass.*] When Adam delved, and Eva span——

LAURENCE. [*Roughly.*] Shut up, Rutherford! Let Agnes have her say!

AGNES. [*With intense earnestness.*] I mean—this thing that we are fighting for is *holy*—yes, it is—and I don't like even the *suspicion* of fun being made of it. I don't like this talk of New Women, and so

on. We're *not* new women—we're not freaks, or eccentrics—we ask nothing abnormal, or extreme. We want to get nearer to—to—the divine—yes, really, the divine—I'm not afraid to say it. So, even at a convivial gathering like this—don't let's make fun. Not have our tongue in our cheek, even when we're dining together. I didn't like what Rutherford said—about the red flag and the linen collar. The woman of the future, whom we are helping to form, will be at least as modest and virtuous as the woman of to-day—and her very freedom, and the nobility that comes from that freedom, will prevent her from doing things that she *does* to-day—things that no one thinks anything of, but to us seem degrading and shocking. We plead in our paper that motherhood shall be open to all women—that no shame shall attach to the child born out of wedlock—or the mother who bears it. Is that dreadful—is it abnormal—to the god who sits on the mountain? *I* am not married, as you know—and have a child, as you know—and you none of you think the worse of me for it, or regard me as depraved, or immoral—for *you* know, and I know, and God knows, that I am none of these things—but a woman who craved for a child—and could meet no man whom she loved enough to give her whole life to him. And I plead, and our paper pleads, for the thousands of women in like case to mine—women who have not had the courage that I have had—women who in dark places and sheltered corners wring their hands and lament over a stunted

and crippled existence. For generations, for hundreds of years, men have sniggered at women when they even *spoke* of these things. *You* don't—I know, even Rutherford doesn't—and it is because our paper is so proudly above the sneer and the jibe that it has become such a mighty engine for good—and the hope and inspiration of every lofty-minded woman throughout the land. And it is for this that I am so grateful to these dear people—to Bartley and Miriam—and thank them from the depths of my heart. And I thank *you* for letting me say these things.

[*She sits quickly, amidst great applause from them all, including* RUTHERFORD. MIRIAM *bends across, and pats* AGNES *on the hand.* BARTLEY *rises, and goes to her.*

RUTHERFORD. [*Sententiously, and the least bit muzzily.*] Very good speech—very. But the honourable lady has misunderstood me. I only——

BARTLEY. You've had *your* turn, Rutherford!

[*He draws a chair up from the wall, and talks eagerly to* AGNES. RUTHERFORD *turns to* EVE, *and begins to explain to her.*

LAURENCE. Bravo, Agnes! Bravo!

RUTHERFORD. Get up, my lad—get up!

LAURENCE. [*Ignoring him.*] Bravo, I say! And let Rutherford and his linen collar go to blazes!

RUTHERFORD. [*Shooting out his shirt-cuffs, and looking at them regretfully.*] If that's the name of—a new laundry—we might try it, Fanny.

LAURENCE. I don't know why he has sprung this claptrap upon us—but I'm glad of it—because it gave us Agnes's speech. And I'm with you, Agnes, in every word you've said! I'd have no barriers—I'd throw open every door! Husbands and wives—all right—but, first of all, men and women!

RUTHERFORD. [*With a snigger.*] What does Eve think of that?

[*They all look at* EVE, *who with bent head has been scribbling on the table-cloth. She glances up, and smiles.*

LAURENCE. [*Who has also thrown a quick look at her, going on as breezily as ever.*] Eve thinks as I do—I speak for her as I do for myself.

RUTHERFORD. [*Enthusiastically.*] Hear, hear!

LAURENCE. And I'm proud—I'm sure Bartley is—of the way Agnes spoke of the paper. That's what we *want* it to be! And we owe it all to Bartley. We'd been muddling away at social schemes—it was he who came along, and said, "Women first!" [*He turns to* BARTLEY.] Didn't you?

BARTLEY. Yes, yes—I did—I thought——

TOBY. [*Laughing.*] And Laurence straightway took the bit between his teeth, and started bolting downhill!

LAURENCE. [*Laughing, too.*] All right, old Dryasdust! Perhaps I *did* want to go a little too far. But he keeps a tight rein on our necks——

TOBY. You need it!

LAURENCE. [*Gaily.*] I daresay I do! And no doubt we're the better for it—our circulation proves that! It's quite true I *would* have gone further than he does—fact is, he's a law-abiding citizen, and I—ain't!

RUTHERFORD. No. Last year's Romantic Ruffian. Shop-soiled. Cheap.

LAURENCE. [*Laughing.*] Can't *any one* stop old Rutherford? And—as we are drinking Bartley's health—don't let's forget that—just one personal word! He took over my paper, with its debts—freed me, I am proud to say it and acknowledge it—from the load of financial embarrassment that was crippling me—didn't want to be editor, I had to force it on him, realizing, very quickly, that he was a far better man for the job than I! And we all know what an editor he *has* been! And the sort of fellow he *is!* Never a truer friend or a kinder heart! The best of us all—and we're proud of him—and love him! Long live Bartley!

[*He rises and waves his glass. The others are following, with shouts of applause,* RUTHERFORD *pushes them back.*

RUTHERFORD. Wait—wait—not ready yet—got to hear Fanny.

MIRIAM. Nonsense, Rutherford. I'm sure she doesn't——

RUTHERFORD. [*Interrupting her.*] Throw open every door, he said! Well—Fanny's been knocking! Can't have Fanny knocking, and door *not* open!

She *wants* to speak! [*He shouts and bangs the table.*] Fanny!

FANNY. [*Snapping at him.*] I *don't* want to. Though it's quite true I did. But only to explain to the others that it was just your irritating way—that I know so well——

RUTHERFORD. [*Thoroughly enjoying himself, and affecting the deepest concern.*] Oh, my darling—can it be——

FANNY. [*More and more irritably.*] It's what he calls his sense of humour—and when that gets mixed up with port, he's simply unbearable.

MIRIAM. [*Mildly.*] Dear Mrs. Collins——

RUTHERFORD. [*Stopping* MIRIAM, *as he rolls delightedly in his chair, and goes on chaffing* FANNY.] Angel child—it's Bartley's health we're drinking—and not mine!

FANNY. [*Completely ignoring him.*] And he's just in the mood—when his one desire is—to annoy every one.

RUTHERFORD. May I remind—my admirable wife——

FANNY. [*Losing all control, in her vexation.*] I'm *not* your wife.

[*There is general exclamation.* MIRIAM *and* AGNES *cry* "Oh!" *and* BARTLEY *and* LAURENCE *stare.* TOBY *shrugs his shoulders and tries to intervene, clears his throat preparatorily.* FANNY *gives a look round the table, and goes on rather contritely.*

FANNY. I don't know, for the life of me why I blurted *that* out just now. Shocked you a bit, I see. [*The ladies protest, somewhat politely, except* EVE, *who takes no notice.*] And I'm rather sorry I said it. But you'd have had to know some time. Though of course I don't often have this privilege of meeting you. And you mustn't think *I* haven't wanted—to get married.

[*She stops abruptly, looks at the table-cloth, and plays with her cup and saucer. There is a moment's rather awkward silence.* RUTHERFORD *remains completely unconcerned, and perfectly happy.* TOBY *throws himself into the breach.*

TOBY. Since it's Bartley's health we're drinking, I ought to put in a word. Because I've known him longer than any of you—even Miriam! We were at school together—and at Oxford together—and I can tell you, he was no end of a swell.

BARTLEY. [*Laughing.*] Oh, wasn't I just! Except in exams. The less said of *them* the better!

TOBY. It was I drew up his articles of partnership, when his father took him in, and he became a Merchant Prince. It was I who was best man at his wedding—and oh, Miriam, *do* you remember the fuss he made? Did *so* want it all to be swagger?

BARTLEY. Ha, ha, I did! St. George's, Hanover Square—that was *my* idea! But not yours, Miriam—eh?

MIRIAM. No. *I* wanted—a third-class elopement!

TOBY. We compromised with the registry-office in the Pancras Road. But the temper he was in! Because he *has* a temper, old Bartley! Ladies and Gentlemen—this may be a revelation to you—but he doesn't show it often—does he, Miriam?

MIRIAM. No. Hardly ever. Never to me!

TOBY. A soft heart goes with it—a kind of combination, he is, of Mary's lamb and a bull in a china-shop! And always, through everything, the best and straightest fellow that walks this earth. Let's drink to him. Bartley!

[*He has scarcely finished before* RUTHERFORD *—on whom the wine is beginning to tell—he has been helping himself freely—shouts* "No, no—not yet! Eve!" *There is protest all round.*

EVE. [*Startled and shrinking.*] No, no!

MIRIAM. [*Vexed.*] This really won't do!

FANNY. [*With a shrug.*] I told you—he's impossible.

LAURENCE. [*Angrily.*] Rutherford, leave her alone!

[*These remarks are simultaneous; they have no effect on* RUTHERFORD, *who goes on bellowing* "Eve! Eve! Eve!" *at the top of his voice.*

FANNY. [*Shouting at him.*] You're becoming an absolute nuisance!

MIRIAM. Bartley, you really must stop this.

BARTLEY. Rutherford, my dear fellow——

LAURENCE. You know perfectly well she never——

[*These remarks are again simultaneous—but they have not the slightest effect on* RUTHERFORD, *who goes on, in a kind of sing-song, yelling* "Eve, Eve, Silence for Eve!"

AGNES. [*Across his back, to* EVE.] Say one word, dear, to keep him quiet!

RUTHERFORD. Eve!

LAURENCE. [*Really angry.*] You donkey!

RUTHERFORD. Eve! Eve! Silence for Eve!

AGNES. [*To* EVE.] Anything, dear. Just to stop him!

EVE. [*Turning to them, very slowly and timidly*]. Very well—if I must . . . I drink to Bartley too. I think as you all do about him.

RUTHERFORD. [*Maliciously.*] And freedom, Eve! We've heard Laurence on Freedom! Give us *your* ideas!

EVE. [*Very startled, as she looks at him.*] I don't think *my* ideas—I mean—I—I—

[*She breaks down, and bursts into tears. There is general exclamation, expressive of sympathy with her, and indignation with* RUTHERFORD, *who merely wags his head, and fills himself another glass.* AGNES *jumps up and goes to* EVE—*so does* LAURENCE.

MIRIAM. Poor little Eve! What a shame!

TOBY. Too bad of Rutherford!

BARTLEY. [*Very concerned.*] Really, really, I'm frightfully sorry!

FANNY. That's Rutherford all over—he likes——

[*These remarks are simultaneous.* RUTHERFORD *pays no heed to them, but sips his port, chuckling blithely to himself.* LAURENCE *has reached* EVE'S *side—he puts his arms round her, sits on the back of her chair, and tries to comfort her. She dries her eyes, and quickly recovers herself, shyly smiling apologies.* AGNES *goes back to her seat.*

LAURENCE. There, there, darling, don't cry. It was a very great shame. Poor little sweetheart!

MIRIAM. Rutherford, I'm really vexed with you. I am.

RUTHERFORD. Temper the wind, hostess! Temper the wind!

MIRIAM. We all spoil him, that's the truth.

RUTHERFORD. And how about Bartley's health? Come along, all of you! UP!

MIRIAM. [*Rising, as do all the others.*] To Bartley! And I drink to him—and thank him too!

[*They all hold up their glasses—with shouts of* "Bartley, Bartley!" LAURENCE *has hastened back to his place,* EVE *being now perfectly tranquil again, to get his glass—he stands beside* MIRIAM. RUTHERFORD *strikes up* "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow" *—they all join in. When they get to the*

"Hip, Hip, Hip, Hurrah!" *stage*, RUTHERFORD *shouts*, "And one for Miriam! Hip, hip, hurrah! And one for Bartley junior, upstairs! Hurrah! And one for the baby, whatever its name is! Hurrah! And now—silence for Bartley!" *The cheers have been heartily given, and glasses drained—they all sit.* BARTLEY *rises. He is deeply moved, and pauses for an instant before speaking. They all shout, and applaud him.*

BARTLEY. My dear friends—I—really—scarcely know what to say. I'm so proud to be here with you—to have people like you—around me. I'm so proud of you all. It's a wonderful thing for a man like myself to be controlling—no, no, not controlling, but guiding—a paper like ours. Miriam, of course, controls and guides me. I am what she has made me.

MIRIAM. No, no.

BARTLEY. [*Looking fondly at her.*] I say, yes, yes. I went out of the City because she wanted me to—I came into this paper because she wanted me to. We've been married seven years—and I've always done what she wanted, and always shall. *Before* I married, I suppose I was just like the other fellows with lots of money. And a bit of a snob, too, I dare say. My ideal woman was the smart girl who rode to hounds, and danced, and flirted, and was satisfied with everything, and didn't care a button for any-

thing outside. But I had the luck to marry Miriam. And she has taught me what women are, and are capable of. [MIRIAM *makes a gesture.*

BARTLEY. [*Nodding.*] Yes, yes, my dear, I know. That's enough about *that.* [*He turns to the others.*] *You* all know! Well, this paper of ours. I took my dear friend Laurence's place—he made me—and, as he says, I put the women's movement in the front. Because, to me—to Miriam and me—that is *the* movement—bigger than the others, bound up with the others, helping the others! Laurence—our fiery, untamed Laurence—was with us at once—and, as you know, chafes, sometimes, at my holding him back. But then, you see, the public—the public's like me—the public go slow! And *they* are beginning to understand that what we're striving for is the—the—the beautiful, and not the ugly. That's all. Nothing nasty about us—about our work, about our paper. As Agnes says, freer men and women, and therefore nobler. Nobler, that's all—nobler! Our aim, our ideal—and we're getting there. Thanks to you—to you all—and to Miriam! Yes—I must say it—especially to Miriam! And so—so—God bless you—and may we celebrate many more anniversaries together.

[*He sits, amid great applause,* RUTHERFORD *being specially enthusiastic.* AGNES, TOBY, FANNY, LAURENCE, *all say nice things to* BARTLEY. MIRIAM *lets her hand rest for a moment on his.*

AGNES. Thank you, Bartley!

FANNY. A great little speech!

TOBY. Good man, Bartley!

LAURENCE. Dear old friend!

[*These remarks are simultaneous.*

RUTHERFORD. [*Sprawling.*] A—jolly—good—speech. Successful evening. Very.

MIRIAM. [*Rising.*] Well—*now* we can go upstairs.

[*They all rise, except* RUTHERFORD, *who remains seated, staring at his glass.*

MIRIAM. Bartley, don't be long.

[LAURENCE *has opened the door.* AGNES *and* EVE *go.* FANNY, *at the door, turns round.*

FANNY. And *please* don't let Rutherford drink any more! Look at him!

RUTHERFORD. [*Rising slowly to his feet.*] I am—proudly conscious—of being—worthy of—inspection.

FANNY. [*Tossing her head.*] Oh, yes. *I* know.

RUTHERFORD. Crypto—conchoid—syphonostomata.

FANNY. [*With a contemptuous shrug.*] Pooh!

[*She goes, followed by* MIRIAM. LAURENCE *closes the door. They all sit—*TOBY *in his old place,* BARTLEY *next to him, then* RUTHERFORD *and* LAURENCE. RUTHERFORD *has undoubtedly drunk too much—but he manifests this only by an excessive slowness of speech and portentous solemnity of manner.*

TOBY. [*Merrily, to* RUTHERFORD.] Well, my boy, *you've* been having a fine fling to-night!

RUTHERFORD. [*As he fills his glass.*] Life—and soul—of the party.

LAURENCE. [*As he sits.*] You *will* have a head to-morrow!

RUTHERFORD. [*Holding up his glass.*] I like—having a head—to-morrow. Better to have a—head—to-morrow—than a—turnip—to-night. [*He lifts up his glass and bows solemnly to the others.*] To the—turnips. [*He drinks.*]

[*They laugh*—TOBY *turns to* BARTLEY.

TOBY. Quaint, you know—when I think of the old days—with your four-in-hands and your supper-parties—and here you are, running this paper!

RUTHERFORD. [*As he looke around.*] What I ask myself sometimes—especially when I'm not—strictly sober—is, what are we doing it for? Eh?

TOBY. [*Laughing.*] That's only *because* you're not strictly sober, Rutherford!

RUTHERFORD. [*Impressively, as he leans forward.*] Let me tell you—I've very great respect—for myself—when I'm in—this condition.

[*He nods his head solemnly, several times.*

LAURENCE. [*Shortly.*] Well, we haven't. Far from it.

RUTHERFORD. That's because you—don't know. I—understand more. Different man. Brain's clear—frightfully clear. Paren—thetically, I've more brain—than all the rest of you—put together.

LAURENCE. [*Drily.*] You're a wonderful person, of course. [*He leans across*] Bartley——

RUTHERFORD. [*Interrupting him ruthlessly.*] Lau-

rence hasn't—mere jumble—philosophy and fiction. When you read his—novels—you skip the—story part—and when you get to the—philosophy part, you —yawn and go to—sleep.

BARTLEY. [*Vexed.*] Look here, Rutherford, don't say such things. They're silly.

LAURENCE. [*Good-humouredly.*] Don't mind him. Thanks, Rutherford, my son!

RUTHERFORD. Bartley doesn't know—how should he? Fine editor—yes. Has a nose. Always give me an editor—with a nose.

BARTLEY. [*Laughing.*] Well, he's turning it up at you now!

RUTHERFORD. But no brain, Bartley, my dear—all heart. Beautiful, streaky heart. Toby Parning hasn't a—brain—but then he's a—lawyer—and never —misses it.

TOBY. [*Merrily, as he shakes his head at him.*] Oh, you ridiculous old ass!

RUTHERFORD. Good man, Toby—with you there—but dry as a—haddock. Makes me thirsty to look at him.

[*He gropes for the decanter*—TOBY *reaches forward and takes it away.*

TOBY. Well, at least, you shan't drink any more! And now shut up, Rutherford, like a good chap! Bartley, I wanted a word with you about——

RUTHERFORD. [*Solemnly.*] Old friends—you'd much better—listen to—me. Look here, we—started this —paper—years ago—didn't we? Title, Manhood—

we've stuck to—that. Twelve of us—weren't there —all men? Three of us — left—of the — twelve Where are the—others?

LAURENCE. [*Shortly.*] Never mind the others.

RUTHERFORD. But I—do mind—We wanted—decent homes—for the workers. Living wage. Reform of the — Poor-Law. And such like. The public didn't care a—damn. Peculiarity of the—public—it never *does* care a damn—for things that—matter. Then we took up the—women—and we're—booming —now.

LAURENCE. [*Eagerly.*] We always, and from the very beginning, "took up" the women, as you call it.

RUTHERFORD. [*Scornfully.*] Oh, yes — the — vote. But the—public—didn't care—and the—women—didn't care.

[*There are indignant protests from the three others.*

LAURENCE. That's not true!

BARTLEY. Of course it isn't!

TOBY. They did—and they do!

LAURENCE. Not care! Haven't we rallied round us all the brightest intellects in England?

RUTHERFORD. All the—brightest intellects—in England—would go into a—cabmen's shelter—and there'd still be room for—you. [*His voice becomes almost dirge-like in its mournfulness.*] No—it's the—Sex business. That has—done it. All the—women —buy us—now.

BARTLEY. [*Wrinkling his brow.*] What d'you mean by the Sex business?

RUTHERFORD. Freer—Divorce—Claim to Maternity—Equal Rights—and so on.

LAURENCE. [*Passionately.*] And aren't these things *right?* Don't *you* believe in them?

RUTHERFORD. Yes—when I'm sober. Don't—when I'm drunk. And the question is, ought I to lend my —quite extraordinary gifts——

LAURENCE. [*Roughly, as he clutches the decanter, and passes it to* RUTHERFORD.] Here, my lad, drink some more. You'll be more extraordinary still.

BARTLEY. [*Protesting.*] No, no, you shouldn't——

LAURENCE. Oh, it passes off very quickly with him. Upstairs, in the drawing-room, he won't turn a hair. I know him.

RUTHERFORD. [*Unsteadily filling his glass.*] Isn't that—just—what we're doing? Giving 'em what they want? But is it *good* for them? I don't know. Is it good for me? [*He holds up his glass.*] I'm not sure. [*He drinks slowly, saying between gulps*] I'm—not—sure.

TOBY. [*Laughing.*] Well, don't worry about it. You'll be *quite* sure to-morrow.

BARTLEY. [*Earnestly.*] And I'll tell you this, Rutherford—just this—you're wrong in what you've been saying—and, drunk or sober, I can't let you say it. I'm giving my life to this movement—I believe in it, with my whole soul.

RUTHERFORD. Miriam does.

BARTLEY. [*Nodding.*] That's quite right; I wouldn't have, but for her. I used to be like the other men at the Club—thought it a joke that women should want things. I don't now. Oh, of course there are other abuses—but it's not fair to say that we neglect *them.* We don't. Only, the women come first. And, working hand in hand as we're doing, I tell you we shall go far.

RUTHERFORD. At present—we've got to—Agnes—having a baby from—the Stores.

[TOBY *can't help laughing, but* BARTLEY *and* LAURENCE *are really angry and indignant.*

BARTLEY. None of that, Rutherford! That's beastly—it's low!

LAURENCE. Good Heavens, yes! Have you ever, in all your life, come across a nobler creature than Agnes?

RUTHERFORD. [*Blandly.*] No one's a—denigin' of it, Sairey.

BARTLEY. And—Rutherford—this comes rather ill from you. Yes, really it does. We were all of us, I think, a little distressed when we heard you weren't married to Fanny.

RUTHERFORD. [*Staring.*] Were you, though?

TOBY. [*Trying to intervene.*] Oh, I say, Bartley——

BARTLEY. [*Nodding across to him.*] Yes, yes, I know. But I think he ought to be told. It really's not fair on her.

LAURENCE. No, it isn't. Say what one pleases of marriage, this is precisely a case——

RUTHERFORD. [*Wagging his head.*] Is it, though? Lawks! who'd have thought it!

BARTLEY. We want to give women freedom—but not to deprive them of their—contract.

TOBY. I say, Bartley, old chap—really—you needn't, just now. And, in any event—after all——

BARTLEY. [*Earnestly, to* TOBY, *across the table.*] She's the mother of his child. She has given him the best years of her life.

TOBY. But scarcely of his class, you know. You saw that to-night. One *must* consider that.

LAURENCE. [*Indignantly.*] Class, Toby! Class!

BARTLEY. Yes—I'm a little surprised. What *has* that to do with it?

TOBY. [*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Oh, my dear fellow——

LAURENCE. She's *entitled* to be his wife! That's her right!

RUTHERFORD. [*Looking in amazement from one to the other.*] My stars—and stripes! She *calls* herself my wife—*I* call her—my wife. What's the odds?

BARTLEY. The odds are, simply, that you could, at any moment you chose, just send her away.

LAURENCE. And that's monstrous—yes, it is monstrous!

BARTLEY. So I say to you, Rutherford—you know how fond we are of you—just think it over—that's all. Now let's go upstairs.

[*He rises, as do the others, except* RUTHERFORD, *who sits there, drumming his fingers on the table.*

RUTHERFORD. I *won't* think it over. It's absurd.

BARTLEY. Rutherford——

RUTHERFORD. Prepos—pos—posterous.

LAURENCE. [*Clapping him roughly on the shoulder.*] Come on—get up.

[BARTLEY *and* TOBY *are standing by the door,* TOBY *evidently remonstrating with* BARTLEY.

RUTHERFORD. [*Waving* LAURENCE *away.*] I write —women's articles—when I'm sober—and believe in 'em, right enough. But I'm a—bit of a man, too. And Fanny's welcome—to all I have—as long as—she goes—on the square.

[*He gets unsteadily on to his legs.*

LAURENCE. [*Turning angrily on him.*] On the square! And who's to be the judge of that? You? You're judge and jury!

RUTHERFORD. [*Catching hold of him, with a drunken snigger.*] That's all ri', old chap. Suppose Fanny played *me* the game—that you and Miriam—are playing on old Bartley?

BARTLEY. [*Turning, in the midst of his talk with* TOBY.] Eh?

LAURENCE. [*Furiously, as he shakes* RUTHERFORD.] You drunken fool!

BARTLEY. [*Vaguely, as he takes a step forward.*] *What* did he say?

[EVE *has come in—the door had opened immediately after* RUTHERFORD'S *last sentence. She comes forward—the men all stop, and*

turn to her. She did not hear what RUTHERFORD *had said, but is evidently struck with the sudden stillness.*

EVE. [*A little awkwardly.*] Oh, Bartley—Miriam says you've been down here quite long enough—she wants——

LAURENCE. [*Hastily.*] We were just going. If I can get Rutherford up. Do him good, I think, to put his head under the pump. Come along!

[*He pushes* RUTHERFORD *to the door. The shock has completely sobered him, and he walks with a dreadful consciousness of what he has done.* BARTLEY'S *eyes follow him and* LAURENCE—*his face gives no sign. At the door* LAURENCE *turns and says,* "Coming, you fellows?" *then he goes, still clutching* RUTHERFORD. EVE, *who also has been watching them, turns to* BARTLEY.

EVE. Well, Bartley—Mr. Parning?

TOBY. [*Recovering himself.*] Yes. Come, Bartley.

[*He takes a step to the door.*

BARTLEY. Wait. One minute. [*He nods to* EVE.] All right, Eve. In a minute.

EVE. [*With rather an anxious look at him.*] You won't be long?

BARTLEY. No. Oh no.

[*She goes, and shuts the door.* TOBY *turns to* BARTLEY, *and forces a laugh.*

TOBY. Extraordinary, that chap, when the wine's in him! He simply hasn't an idea of what he's saying.

BARTLEY. [*Still in a dull dazed voice.*] What did he mean—when he——

TOBY. [*Noisily.*] My dear chap, he *didn't* mean—he was far from meaning! Ask your '84 port what he meant—and you'd have to put the question to the best part of two bottles! And I say—look here—since we have a minute—you know the review last week of Professor Wilkins's book? Well—the pompous old idiot—threatens to serve us—with a writ!

BARTLEY. Professor—Wilkins?

TOBY. Yes. Got the letter to-night—from his lawyers. The review *was* a bit scathing, of course. Miriam wrote it.

BARTLEY. Miriam—wrote it?

TOBY. [*Nodding.*] Yes. And he demands—a complete and grovelling apology! Of course that's absurd. But I fancy a few editorial words——

BARTLEY. What did—Rutherford—mean?

TOBY. [*Merrily.*] Oh, my dear fellow—still harping on that! Don't be a goose! Tell me—about old Wilkins——

BARTLEY. [*Still in the same dull voice.*] Rutherford said—Laurence and Miriam——

TOBY. Rutherford's drunk.

BARTLEY. Laurence and Miriam.

TOBY. [*Laying a hand on his arm.*] Old man, don't be silly! Let's go upstairs. You'll put in that word or two.

BARTLEY. [*Raising his head, and looking at him.*] I want you to tell me.

TOBY. [*More and more noisily.*] Man alive, isn't this stupid? He said the first thing that came into his head. He——

BARTLEY. Tell me.

TOBY. But good Heavens! Don't you see yourself how absurd——

BARTLEY. [*Suddenly freeing himself, with a scream that is strangled in his throat.*] Oh!

[*He rushes wildly out of the room.* TOBY *has tried to clutch and restrain him—he follows, crying,* "Bartley, Bartley!"

THE CURTAIN FALLS QUICKLY

ACT II

[*The drawing room at the* CHAMBERS'S. *It is a double room, on the first floor, connected by folding-doors on the left with another room inside. These doors are at present closed. The windows are at the back: two long windows of the conventional London house, extending down to the floor, with probably a balcony outside. These windows are heavily curtained. Between them are long book-shelves encased in glass; on the broad shelf above, statuettes, photographs of children, and various knicknacks. In front is a sofa. In the left corner is a cabinet with china—further a revolving bookcase, with library books, reviews and magazines on the top. In the opposite corner a grand piano. The fire-place is in the centre of the right wall; there is a sofa on one side of it, by the piano—on the other side a long settee, with no back—between the two, a couple of armchairs. The door is up stage, to the right.*

Close to the folding-doors that lead to the inner room is a card-table, on which is a bridge-box, with markers, etc. Chairs are placed at each side of the table.

There are flowers, of the conventional order, about the room, which is empty, when the curtain rises.

[AGNES *and* EVE *come in,* AGNES *with her arm affectionately round her.*

AGNES. Poor dear Eve! It was a very great shame!

EVE. *I* am ashamed—to have been so silly.

AGNES. *My* fault. I shouldn't have persuaded you.

EVE. I can't think what made me. [*She moves from* AGNES, *and sits on the sofa at the back.*] You know, it was very hot down there.

AGNES. It's very warm here, don't you think?

EVE. Yes. All the windows are closed. I love air.

AGNES. I think we might open one.

[*She goes to the back, pulls a curtain, and opens a window.*

EVE. [*Rising.*] Let me help you.

[*She goes to* AGNES, *who has already opened the window.* MIRIAM *comes in, with* FANNY. *They have evidently been having some sort of little argument on the stairs.*

MIRIAM. [*Talking to* FANNY *as she comes in.*] Dear Mrs. Collins, you really misunderstand me!

FANNY. [*A little sulkily.*] I don't know. I can see it has made a difference. That's all.

[MIRIAM *shakes her head.* AGNES *steps forward.*

AGNES. Miriam, we've opened a window, you don't mind?

MIRIAM. Not at all. Oh, Parkes has put out the card-table, I see. I don't fancy we'll want to——

FANNY. Oh, yes, for goodness' sake, let's have a game. [*She goes to the card-table, sits behind it, and takes out the cards. They are both new packs; she proceeds to strip the paper off one of them, and then deals the cards out one by one, in five little heaps, to shuffle them. Then, looking up.*] I suppose we'd better wait for the men?

[EVE *has wandered to the back of the room, and is turning over the books on the revolving stand.* AGNES *and* MIRIAM *are both looking a little uncomfortably at* FANNY.

MIRIAM. Eve and Agnes don't play.

FANNY. Have a double dummy?

MIRIAM, Oh no, they won't be long.

AGNES. [*Going impulsively to* FANNY, *and sitting to the left of her.*] Dear Mrs. Collins, I'd like to tell you —one didn't have an opportunity downstairs——

FANNY. [*Breaking in pettishly.*] I was a great ass to say anything. Wish I hadn't.

MIRIAM. On the contrary, you were quite right. What is completely beyond me, is Rutherford refusing.

FANNY. [*With a shrug, still dealing out the cards.*] He says he won't till his mother dies.

MIRIAM. [*Going to the table, sitting, facing* AGNES.] Why?

FANNY. Ask *him*. All black lace and white hair, his mother. Filigree hands. *That* sort.

AGNES. You know her?

FANNY. Bless you, no! I'm not worthy. Bishop's widow—came once, when I was out—he had arranged that—to see the boy. But I made such a rumpus *that* won't occur again.

MIRIAM. [*Indignantly.*] A nice way to treat you!

FANNY. [*Indifferently, as she gathers up the cards and shuffles them.*] I'm not "class" enough for his mother. Class enough to look after him—and say he's out when the duns call, and do all the drudgery—but not for him to marry. He's a dreadful snob.

AGNES. But I can't understand—he's so proud of his boy!

FANNY. [*With a gleam of tenderness.*] Yes—he can't help that—little Wilfrid . . . . And I thought, too, that because of him . . . . Well, he says when his mother dies. She's the sort to live to a hundred. And if she *did* die, there'd probably be an aunt.

MIRIAM. [*Very earnestly.*] I'm sorry. I'm *very* sorry. I've always thought such a lot of Rutherford. I'd never have believed it!

AGNES. Nor I. Never!

FANNY. [*With a snigger.*] Because of the articles he writes? Bless you, he has his tongue in his cheek when he writes them! And I'll tell you more. All the men have!

MIRIAM. [*Sternly.*] You mustn't say that. It's absurd.

AGNES. Of course. Oh no, oh no——

FANNY. [*Carelessly, as she spreads out the cards again, and then gathers them up.*] Oh, wait till the shoe pinches *them!*

MIRIAM. Men aren't all the same. Very likely some are not sincere. But not all.

FANNY. [*As she turns her head, with half a shrug and half a yawn.*] What's Mrs. Targill doing?

EVE. [*Still turning over the books.*] Just listening.

AGNES. Why not play to us, Eve?

EVE. [*To* MIRIAM.] Would you like me to?

MIRIAM. Yes, dear. Do.

[EVE *goes to the piano—opens it, without lifting the wing, and begins to play a Chopin Nocturne. She plays very softly—when the others start talking again, as they do almost immediately, she plays so softly as to be scarcely audible—and, in a minute or two, leaves the piano, and goes back to her books.*

MIRIAM. [*Firmly.*] I'll speak to Rutherford.

FANNY. [*Who has taken out the other pack, and begun the same process with that.*] I wouldn't if I were you.

MIRIAM. And Bartley shall too.

FANNY. [*Carelessly.*] He won't mind.

MIRIAM. We'll see about that. If he doesn't marry you, he shan't be on the paper any more.

FANNY. [*With a shrug.*] Lot of good that would do me. I can only just manage now. The paper's the one thing he sticks to.

MIRIAM. It means something, doesn't it, to us—the paper? And can we allow a man to work on it——

FANNY. [*Still playing with the cards.*] All very well for you two. You've money.

AGNES. It's not a question of money!

FANNY. Yes, it is. And always will be.

MIRIAM. [*Eagerly.*] How can you say that? What has money to do with it? Don't you see how degrading your position is?

FANNY. [*Quite unmoved.*] You see, I was fond of him.

MIRIAM. Well—wasn't he, of you?

FANNY. But I wasn't quite able to—ask it—then.

MIRIAM. What do you mean?

FANNY. [*Carelessly.*] Oh, just that. I'd had an—adventure—when I was very young. In fact—since you *must* know—I was living with another man when Rutherford met me. There. That's been my life—those two men. I liked Rutherford much better than the other—I left the other. I couldn't *ask* Rutherford to marry me at the time—but I thought he would, later. Well, he hasn't—and he never will.

MIRIAM. [*Firmly.*] He shall.

FANNY. Oh no, he won't. And I'll tell you more. He only keeps me, because of the boy.

MIRIAM. [*Fiercely.*] Keeps you!

AGNES. [*Shocked.*] My dear!

FANNY. [*Cheerfully.*] Yes. And if it weren't for Wilfrid he'd send me packing to-morrow. So it's not worth talking about really—is it?

MIRIAM. How can you allow it, accept it?

AGNES. This is just the sort of thing we're fighting! But when we women all stand together——

FANNY. Only you never will, for one thing—and, for another, there'll always be the woman like me. [*She stifles a yawn.*] Oh, I do wish we could have some bridge!

MIRIAM. [*Looking round the room.*] Eve dear, you're by the bell. Would you mind ringing? We'll let the men know we want them. They've been down quite long enough.

EVE. Shall I go and tell them, Miriam?

MIRIAM. It would be very sweet of you, dear.

EVE. I will, gladly. [*She goes.*

MIRIAM. [*Bending eagerly over* FANNY.] Mrs. Collins, we haven't seen you very often. We shall hope to, in future. And we'll leave this to Bartley. No, no, I assure you, I'm certain that Bartley——

FANNY. Rutherford says to me, "You're free, aren't you? Isn't that what women are shrieking for? Freedom!"

MIRIAM. [*Indignantly.*] That's freedom for men, not women! It's quite too disgraceful!

AGNES. Of course. *You* can't leave him, because of the boy.

FANNY. [*Carelessly, as she plays with the cards again.*] You see, I'm one of the betwixts and betweens. Not like you and Miss Bell. Just got my bit of good looks. And they're going.

AGNES. [*Fervently.*] There *are* no betwixts and

betweens! We all have our self-respect and our dignity!

FANNY. Yes, yes, I know. Well, some are, and some aren't.

MIRIAM. Aren't what?

FANNY. Fit for it.

MIRIAM. Fit for what? What do you mean?

FANNY. [*With a nod in* AGNES'S *direction.*] What *she* calls the dignity, self-respect, and all that. I tell you, there are lots like me.

MIRIAM. [*Passionately.*] But there *shan't* be! That shall all change!

FANNY. [*With a shrug.*] I don't know. Anyhow—I'm jolly sorry I let it out!

[*The door opens, and* LAURENCE *comes in, looking very white, and still clutching* RUTHERFORD, *who is almost piteously miserable and ashamed, and completely sobered by the shock.* LAURENCE *stops by the door, gives a look round the room, and calls quietly,* "Miriam!" *She turns to him.*

MIRIAM. Well? Where are the others?

LAURENCE. Will you come here a moment?

[MIRIAM *rises and goes to him;* AGNES *and* FANNY *watch them curiously.*

LAURENCE. [*In a low voice.*] This fool—has told.

MIRIAM. [*With a start.*] What!

RUTHERFORD. [*Twisting his hands.*] I'm so—dreadfully—sorry.

LAURENCE. [*Very nervously.*] They'll be here in a minute. Do you think I'd better——

MIRIAM. [*Quickly.*] Sh, sh. What did he——

LAURENCE. Eve came in, just at the moment. . . . I don't know whether he . . . I went out, with Rutherford. What shall we do?

MIRIAM. [*Coldly—she has regained complete self-control.*] Fanny wants some bridge.

RUTHERFORD. [*Moving to her.*] Miriam—I—I—the fact is, I was——

MIRIAM. [*Without looking at him, returning to the table.*] Sit down. Let's cut for partners.

[LAURENCE *and* RUTHERFORD *follow her to the card-table.*

AGNES [*Anxiously.*] Miriam—has anything——

FANNY. [*Roughly.*] What has Rutherford been up to now?

RUTHERFORD. [*Miserably.*] Oh, good God—I——

MIRIAM. [*Who has sat to the right of* FANNY.] Cut, Rutherford. And you, Laurence.

[*They both do so, mechanically. She and* FANNY *turn up a card.*

MIRIAM. Fanny, you were the lowest. It's your deal.

FANNY. Yes, I cut a two. I've got Rutherford for a partner! Not my lucky day, this isn't.

[LAURENCE *has sat opposite* MIRIAM, RUTHERFORD *between them;* FANNY *has offered the cards to* LAURENCE, *and nudges his elbow; he cuts; she proceeds to deal, in complete*

unconcern. EVE *comes in—they all turn their heads to her, except* FANNY, *who goes on dealing.*

MIRIAM. [*Quietly, to* EVE.] Aren't Bartley and Toby coming, Eve?

EVE. Yes. In a minute.

LAURENCE. [*Nervously.*] Eve—did Bartley——

MIRIAM. [*Reprovingly.*] Laurence—please. Eve, what will you do? There's a chair behind you, Agnes.

[FANNY *finishes her deal—*EVE *wanders to the piano, and stands with her back to the others.* AGNES *remains behind* FANNY'S *chair.* LAURENCE'S *face twitches, but he shows no other sign.*

RUTHERFORD. [*Who is quite broken-hearted, whispering to* MIRIAM.] Oh, Miriam, I——

MIRIAM. *Do* be quiet. [*She gathers up her cards, as do the others.*] It *is* hot in here.

EVE. [*Turning.*] Shall I open the window a little more?

MIRIAM. If you would, dear. Parkes always builds up a huge fire when we don't want it. Fanny, your call.

[EVE *goes to the window, and opens it a little more.*

FANNY. [*Chuckling over a fine hand.*] No trumps.

MIRIAM. Two clubs. Rutherford?

RUTHERFORD. [*Whose hands tremble so violently he can scarcely hold his cards.*] Oh——

MIRIAM. [*Impatiently.*] Well?

RUTHERFORD. I—pass.

MIRIAM. *Do* be on your game. Laurence?

LAURENCE. [*Who has scarcely looked at his cards.*] I call a diamond.

MIRIAM. Don't be silly—I've gone two clubs. You'll have to——

FANNY. Oh, never mind. Two no trumps.

MIRIAM. [*Looking at her cards again.*] Three clubs. [*She puts them down.*] Rutherford?

RUTHERFORD. [*Miserably.*] Oh——

MIRIAM. [*Impatiently.*] Well?

[*The door bursts open, and* BARTLEY *comes tearing in. He is frightfully excited—completely beside himself. He gives a wild look round, goes to the card-table, and bangs his fist on it.* FANNY *gets up, very annoyed at the interruption—*AGNES *screams—the cards fall from* RUTHERFORD'S *hands.* LAURENCE *and* MIRIAM *give no sign.* EVE *stands by the window, watching.*

MIRIAM. [*Reproachfully, as she turns to him.*] Bartley!

BARTLEY. Is it true?

MIRIAM. [*Steadily.*] Yes.

BARTLEY. [*Leaning across the table, his fists clenched, his face almost touching* LAURENCE'S.] Beast!

[LAURENCE *springs to his feet;* TOBY *has come in, panting, and catches hold of*

BARTLEY—MIRIAM *exclaims under her breath, but doesn't stir.* FANNY *gives another look at her cards, then, very regretfully, puts them down, and walks away, with a shrug.* AGNES *stares at them, wild-eyed.* EVE *merely watches.*

TOBY. [*Clinging to him.*] Bartley—what are you doing?

AGNES. [*Wringing her hands.*] Bartley, Bartley!

TOBY. Eve's here! Think of Eve!

[*Mechanically* BARTLEY *turns his head, as do the others, except* MIRIAM, *who still does not stir.* EVE *steps forward.*

EVE. [*Quietly.*] Laurence—let's go.

TOBY. Yes, yes—you'd better.

BARTLEY. [*Madly, trying to shake off* TOBY, *who clings desperately to him.*] He shan't go—he shan't!

RUTHERFORD. [*Eagerly, to* BARTLEY.] Look here—I was drunk, that's all—didn't mean——

BARTLEY. [*Bending over* MIRIAM.] You say that it's true? It is?

MIRIAM. [*Rising, and facing him.*] Yes, I tell you. Yes!

BARTLEY. [*Almost foaming at the mouth, as he yells at* LAURENCE.] You dog! You hound!

[TOBY *and* RUTHERFORD *both hang on to* BARTLEY, *who tries madly to get at* LAURENCE. AGNES *is in the deepest distress*—FANNY *looks on ironically, leaning against the wall.* EVE *goes quietly to*

LAURENCE, *whose mood has changed to one of defiant anger.*

EVE. [*Touching him on the shoulder.*] Come.

BARTLEY. [*Madly.*] He *shan't* go, I tell you!

EVE. [*Leaving* LAURENCE *and taking a step towards* BARTLEY.] Bartley.

BARTLEY. [*Turning haggardly to her.*] Yes?

EVE. [*Shaking her head.*] Don't. . . . [*She moves to the door, and calls.*] Laurence!

LAURENCE. [*Sulkily, as he goes to her.*] All right. [*As he passes* BARTLEY, *he looks at him truculently.*] But I don't want *him* to think——

BARTLEY. [*Trying his hardest to shake off* TOBY *and* RUTHERFORD.] The low scoundrel, the ruffian——

LAURENCE. [*Shouting.*] Don't yell at me like that! Don't call me such names!

BARTLEY. I've paid his debts — I've given him money——

MIRIAM. [*Scornfully.*] Money!

LAURENCE. [*With a turn towards* BARTLEY.] Look here—I won't have that—I won't——

EVE. [*Stepping between them.*] Come.

LAURENCE. [*Sulkily.*] Yes. Only——

EVE. [*With authority.*] Come, I tell you!

LAURENCE. Miriam—shall I?

MIRIAM. [*Feverishly.*] Yes, yes, of course! Go, all of you—please!

[EVE *takes* LAURENCE *by the arm; he goes very reluctantly, muttering defiance—while*

BARTLEY *yells incoherently at him, still struggling with* TOBY *and* RUTHERFORD.

RUTHERFOD. [*Releasing his hold as soon as the door has closed, with a movement towards* MIRIAM.] I'm so —dreadfully—sorry——

FANNY. [*Clutching him roughly by the shoulder.*] Come along! No good *your* saying any more!

RUTHERFORD. [*Miserably.*] Miriam——

MIRIAM, Go, go!

RUTHERFORD. [*To* BARTLEY.] You know—I was——

FANNY. [*Pushing him along.*] How much oftener do you want to tell them that? [*She gets him to the door.*] And just my luck! The very best hand I've ever held in my life!

[*She pushes him out—he is still muttering excuses. She closes the door after them—and can be heard outside, saying,* "A hundred aces, and seven diamonds, to the king, queen, knave!"

TOBY. [*Releasing* BARTLEY.] Now, for Heaven's sake, Bartley! And you, Miriam—a moment of calm: Pride, of course, and all that—oh, yes. But don't play with him now! Don't you see he's nearly off his head? You've been friends with Laurence, of course. Resented Bartley's tone, his questions. But what on earth makes you——

MIRIAM. [*Firmly.*] That's no use, Toby. He asked, was it true. And I said, yes. It is!

BARTLEY. [*Roaring.*] You!

[*His movement is so fierce that* TOBY *clutches him again in alarm.*

TOBY. Bartley, Bartley!

BARTLEY. You hear what she says! You hear!

AGNES. She's your wife, Bartley!

BARTLEY. Don't talk to me! Go away!

TOBY. We can't leave you like this! Miriam, I do beg of you——

MIRIAM. [*Feverish and exalted.*] I ought to have told him before! I ought to have told him myself.

BARTLEY. Told me! That's all she thinks of! That's all!

MIRIAM. And I'm *glad* that he knows! I'm glad!

BARTLEY. You are, are you? That's fine! Well, *he* shall be, too, when I get him! You wait!

TOBY. Bartley, control yourself! You must, really! You must!

BARTLEY. [*Turning on him.*] Why don't you go? What business is this of yours? [*He turns to* AGNES.] And you, too, over there, with your fine speeches! Why don't you leave us? This is *our* affair, isn't it? Go!

TOBY. [*Clutching him again.*] Bartley, Bartley, I say! What are you thinking of? what are you doing? Your eyes are starting out of your head—you look like a murderer! Control yourself, for God's sake!

[*In his blind fury,* BARTLEY *raises an arm, as though to strike* TOBY—*then he suddenly collapses—his body goes limp—he would*

have fallen, but for TOBY, *who catches him, and drags him to the settle by the fire.*

AGNES. [*With a cry.*] He has fainted!

[MIRIAM, *who has never moved from the card-table, seems suddenly to awake—she goes anxiously to the others.*

TOBY. [*Bending over him.*] No, no—just give him a glass of water. . . . Don't worry—he has been like this before. . . . *Is* there any water? [MIRIAM *has gone to the bell—he stops her.*] No, no, don't ring—we don't want the servants——

[AGNES *fishes a small bottle of salts out of her bag and gives it to* TOBY.

TOBY. Yes, yes—here, smell this. . . . That's right—he's better. . . . [*He turns to* AGNES.] I say, won't you go? Don't you think? Just leave me—perhaps I can——

AGNES. [*Shaking her head.*] Wait.

[BARTLEY *slowly comes to, breathing very heavily.* MIRIAM *stands at the back of the room, watching him.* AGNES *is on one side of* BARTLEY, TOBY *on the other.*

BARTLEY. [*Completely broken, in a low wail.*] Oh, my God! Oh, my God!

AGNES. [*Gently.*] Bartley——

BARTLEY. Agnes, Agnes! Oh, Agnes, think of it!

AGNES. Bartley, listen. This is a great blow to you. It is—to me. But meet it like a man, Bartley—like the man that you are.

BARTLEY. [*Faintly.*] It was the . . . suddenness. It was the . . . shock.

AGNES. I am fonder of you two than of anyone in the world. [*She takes his hand—holds it in hers for a moment, then goes to* MIRIAM.] Miriam, think only now of what he is suffering. [*She kisses her.*] Come, Toby.

TOBY. Yes, yes. . . . [*He is deeply moved, and turns slowly from* BARTLEY *to* MIRIAM.] Bartley—the outside world's going on—'busses and trams are running.

AGNES. [*At the door.*] Come.

TOBY. Yes, yes. . . . But I mean . . . there are millions and millions of people . . .

[*He looks at them again, then goes abruptly, followed by* AGNES, *who closes the door. There is a moment's silence.* MIRIAM *stands where she did, scarcely moving:* BARTLEY, *still breathing heavily, is staring into the fire.*

BARTLEY. [*In a low voice, without turning his head.*] Well?

MIRIAM. [*Gently.*] I am sorry to have given you this pain.

[BARTLEY *warms his hands mechanically at the fire.* MIRIAM *drops into a chair by the card-table.*

BARTLEY. [*Still not looking at her, and in the same dull, dazed voice.*] I thought you loved me.

MIRIAM. I do.

BARTLEY. [*Looking at her in surprise for a moment, then turning to the fire again.*] That's odd—that's very odd. I don't quite understand. You love me—and you are his—mistress?

MIRIAM. [*With an impatient gesture.*] That's a loathsome word—please don't use it. I am nobody's mistress—I am my own mistress.

[BARTLEY *gives a faint shrug—there is again a moment's silence.*

BARTLEY. The two children upstairs—are they mine?

MIRIAM. You're not quite yourself yet.

BARTLEY. Then I suppose they are. I should be sorry if they weren't. But would you tell me—if they weren't?

MIRIAM. [*Restlessly.*] That's not the way to talk to me. If you're going to talk like that, it won't help us. I could have denied it all, couldn't I? Rutherford would have gone on his knees, withdrawn everything. And of course you'd have believed me. Wouldn't you?

BARTLEY. Yes.

MIRIAM. I wouldn't do it. I hate lies—I *don't* lie. I *loathed* your not knowing. I *wanted* you to know.

BARTLEY. [*Turning to her again.*] Then why didn't you tell me?

MIRIAM. [*Slowly.*] I suppose it was something of the—old-fashioned woman in me—that kept me from telling you. I meant to, again and again. Then I

said, to-morrow. I'm ashamed enough! But now you shall know all—all—and you may be perfectly certain that what I'm saying is absolutely true. Till a few months ago you had been the only man in my life—I had never even *thought* of another man. Do you believe that?

BARTLEY. Yes.

MIRIAM. Then—Laurence—— [*She stops.*

BARTLEY. You love him?

MIRIAM. [*Shaking her head.*] No.

BARTLEY. [*Still in the same dull, quiet tone.*] Come, come, that's absurd, isn't it? Would you have—done this—if you hadn't loved him? You're not that sort of woman. Oh no.

MIRIAM. [*Rising, moving swiftly to the settle, and sitting beside him.*] Wait—wait—and listen. You're quite calm now—you're splendid—and that makes it easier for me to tell you. And all—all—hiding nothing! I want you to understand that *you* are the one man I love.

BARTLEY. [*Turning to her in amazement.*] I?

MIRIAM. [*Nodding.*] *Really* love—yes. And he—hasn't interfered.

BARTLEY. [*Knitting his brow.*] What?

MIRIAM. That's difficult for you to believe—but you will! As *I* would have if there'd been some other woman—if, for instance, you and Eve——

BARTLEY. [*Amazed.*] Eve! Good heaven! You never imagined——

MIRIAM. She's dumb with the rest of us—you're

the one person she talks to, or cares for. But I knew, of course. I just mention her because, if it *had* been, I'd still be quite sure that Eve, twenty Eves, couldn't take you, the real you, from me.

BARTLEY. And that's how you want me to think about you and Laurence?

MIRIAM. If you can. I don't know *whether* you can. It's the test.

BARTLEY. You haven't done this—to test me?

MIRIAM. I did it because I *had* to do it.

BARTLEY. Why—if you didn't love him?

MIRIAM. I didn't *know*, then, that I didn't love him. But the truth is that he doesn't matter—that he's outside—call it a freak, a caprice, what you choose! No—wait, wait, let me go on. I want you to see—right down into me. I want to speak to you—as I would to God—were He judging me! Ever since we've been married—or at least for the last few years—it has weighed on me—yes, yes, it has—been like a load and a burden—that I wasn't free—*belonged* to you, that was the word, *because* I had married you. And I'm not a morbid woman—I mean, I'm healthy and normal—it wasn't *that* side. But again and again I've said to myself—or something rebellious inside me has said—it's not because you *love* Bartley—as you do, as you do—that he must be the only man in your life—but because you're his wife, and you've *got* to. You see?

BARTLEY. [*Shaking his head.*] No.

MIRIAM. [*With intense eagerness, the words pouring*

out.] But you must, you *must!* I didn't ask that sort of fidelity from you—didn't value it—knew there was something bigger and greater than these conventional trifles! And that's why I said if you and Eve—— [*He makes a gesture of protest.*] Yes, yes, I know—it's merely to show you how I felt! And *he* did, too—Laurence. *You're* all for Law, just law—because it *is* law. Well, we're not, he and I. There's something in us that hates law—revolts from it—the law that we haven't made! As a child I was like that—always a rebel—I don't know why. But it's in my blood—it's stronger than I am! And it became an obsession almost—clouded my feeling for you—the chains, captivity—iron! And your being so sure of me even was galling—you were so abominably sure! And then, one day, suddenly, I thought of Laurence. Was it love—or just an escape? I didn't know. But it grew—seemed to hide you, eclipse you. And for weeks and months I walked about, fighting it, trying to crush it—because I hadn't lived with you all these years without knowing how *you* would suffer if I wasn't faithful. The hateful word—but I knew it was *your* word—and almost hated *you* for it! That was where I had got to! And he, in all these long talks of ours, he never made love to me, never—but I saw—I saw quite plainly, that he, too. . . . And I knew he would never, because of his friendship for you, because to him too, I was your property. . . . And I saw you my prison, my jailer, and I behind bars.

. . And then, one day, suddenly, blinded, like a bird trying to get out of its cage—wild with feelings I couldn't read, couldn't analyse, but that just overcame me—I gave myself to him—yes, I did! Triumphantly, gladly, courting all risks! Proudly, as though I were doing something grand and magnificent! But then——

BARTLEY. [*Almost to himself, as he writhes in agony.*] My God! Oh, my God!

MIRIAM. [*Staring straight ahead of her, unconscious of his exclamation.*] Then, I was sorry.

BARTLEY. [*Mastering himself, with a great effort.*] Why?

MIRIAM. [*Slowly.*] I don't know—I was sorry. . . . I felt as though I'd come out of a dream—as though something dreadful had happened—or I was awaking, after some anæsthetic. The triumph, the grandeur, had gone—it all seemed squalid now—he did. I resented the way he looked at me—his little conquering air. . . . And I asked myself why—had *I* changed, had he—and it burst upon me, in a flash—it was because I didn't love *him*, but loved you! As though a cloud lifted I saw—that I only loved you!

BARTLEY. [*With intense, almost painful, nervousness.*] You—told him?

MIRIAM. No, no, I couldn't—it was too—sacred! But all that was I, myself, rushed back to you! I mean, he was forgotten—and I saw only you! Saw, oh, so clearly, what we really were to each other—more than husband and wife—much more! And

you were no longer the jailer—but the man, the one man in the world, whom I loved, or could love. Free again—yes, I was free—and, being free, wanted—you!

BARTLEY. [*Speaking with terrible difficulty.*] But still—you and he—I mean——

MIRIAM. [*Turning to him.*] What?

BARTLEY. You met—again?

MIRIAM. [*Carelessly.*] Yes, yes—once or twice. Something foolish—a kind of prudishness almost—kept me from telling him—that he'd just been a pebble I'd picked up in the road—a key I had found—that unlocked myself—and you! But now it will be very simple—and he fades away—goes back to his place, his poor place. . . . Oh, I'm so glad you've listened to me like this! This is what I had hoped, had expected! I saw us two talking, as we're doing, soul to soul!

BARTLEY. I made a dreadful scene . . . didn't I?

MIRIAM. That wasn't *your* fault—it was mine. I ought to have gone to you, very simply, and told you. You'd have understood then, as you do now!

BARTLEY. [*Still faintly, and almost crushed under the blow.*] Yes—in a way. I *do* understand—in a way.

MIRIAM. Of course! I've been through the fire, Bartley—taken my love for you through the fire—and looked at it there. Now the future is clear—with no doubts, no unhappiness—the future I've chosen—with you! . . . Well—that's all. You've heard everything now. You've heard the truth.

BARTLEY. [*Slowly.*] I believe you *have* told me the truth, Miriam.

MIRIAM. [*Happily.*] I knew that you would—I knew that you would!

BARTLEY. [*Twisting and untwisting his fingers.*] I've a glimmering of what you mean—yes, I have. . . . I'm not pretending that it isn't a . . . shock. You see, it's rather difficult . . . for a man. . . . But I believe you—I do. And I—forgive, Miriam.

MIRIAM. [*Restlessly.*] Oh, Bartley, Bartley, you *haven't* understood, if you say that!

BARTLEY. Perhaps that wasn't—quite the right word. Don't let's bother about words. Of course you don't realize—what this means—to me. But never mind that. I *do* understand—in a way, Miriam. That what you've done—It wasn't quite you—*my* you—who did it.

MIRIAM. [*Nodding.*] No. Another person altogether. A prisoner escaping!

BARTLEY. [*Still twisting and untwisting his fingers.*] Yes, yes, I'm sure you have told me the truth. . . . It was . . . something outside. The something—wild—there always has been in you.

MIRIAM. Yes.

BARTLEY. I was conscious of it—yes, I was—I *know* I was, now. Though of course I never imagined —[*he pulls himself up with a jerk*] but that's gone now—it's gone! And you've come back to me! *That's* what I must remember—just that.

MIRIAM. [*Eagerly.*] Oh, Bartley, I can't tell you how happy you make me!

BARTLEY. I mustn't look on you as though you were an ordinary woman. . . . The difficulty now, of course, is about *him*. I don't want to turn him away from the paper.

MIRIAM. No, no.

BARTLEY. *His* paper, after all. I don't want to be vindictive—to punish. And I'll leave my money in it, too. We'll go out of it, you and I.

MIRIAM. [*Looking at him with surprise.*] Why should we?

BARTLEY. [*Turning and staring at her.*] Why?

MIRIAM. Yes. You're doing such splendid work there.

BARTLEY. [*After a moment's bewildered pause.*] But —my dear—I must either send *him* away—or give up the editorship—mustn't I? You see, he comes every day—does a lot of work there. I can't meet him again.

MIRIAM. Oh, Bartley—isn't that foolish?

BARTLEY. [*Shaking his head.*] No, no, only human. *I*'m only—an ordinary man, you know. And besides —isn't it obvious that we *must* cut ourselves adrift from the paper—if only to prevent *your* meeting him?

MIRIAM. [*Open-eyed.*] To prevent my——

BARTLEY. Of course, of course.

MIRIAM. But—haven't I told you——

BARTLEY. [*Nervously, looking hard at her.*] Yes, yes. But, naturally, you must never see him again.

[*A shadow comes over her face, something of disappointment.*] You mean that—surely you meant it!

MIRIAM. [*With a slight shake of the head.*] No.

BARTLEY. You didn't!

MIRIAM. [*With a little shrug.*] Come, come, can it matter—in the very least bit—whether I see him again or not? *You* know that!

BARTLEY. [*Firmly.*] Miriam, you *must* not see him again.

MIRIAM. [*With a frown.*] Must, Bartley?

BARTLEY. [*With an effort—a mighty effort.*] Yes, yes, my dear—really. I accept everything. I'll never blame you—never reproach you—not even in my mind. But, obviously, it must be ended.

MIRIAM. It is.

BARTLEY. I must be sure that it is.

MIRIAM. But haven't I told you——

BARTLEY. My life wouldn't be bearable—I couldn't live.

MIRIAM. [*Reproachfully.*] Bartley!

BARTLEY. The mere thought that you might be with him again——

MIRIAM. Be with him? Oh, my dear—need *you* be afraid! Bartley, you've been so splendid! Don't spoil it!

BARTLEY. [*Looking steadily at her.*] After all, you know—after all—you've only given me words—words that mean nothing—unless you prove them.

MIRIAM. [*Proudly.*] My having spoken them—proves them!

BARTLEY. When you're not there—before me—can't you imagine my dreadful doubts? No, no, don't be angry. I'm not asking much. I've never enquired, hitherto, where you went, or whom you went with. I won't in the future. Just make this little concession. Just promise.

MIRIAM. [*Eagerly.*] But think what it is you're asking! As though you didn't believe me! As though I weren't giving him up of my own free will!

BARTLEY. [*Trembling with suppressed excitement.*] Miriam, Miriam, you're making it hard for me—harder than I think you should. You don't know how nearly I went under. I'm standing on tiptoe now, trying to look—above things. Above—facts. Miriam. Because—it's rather dreadful to—speak of—but—you know—you told me—it's not broken off—yet.

MIRIAM, I believed that I loved him—and found that I didn't—but only loved you! Isn't that enough? Surely, surely, you can be satisfied—with that!

BARTLEY. [*With an intense fierceness and passion he can only partially control.*] When was the—last time—you met?

MIRIAM. [*With a scornful shrug.*] I've forgotten. And what *does* it matter?

BARTLEY. [*With a vindictive glance at her.*] Well, you see—it does—to me. You were prevented, you said, by some sort of—prudishness. . . . That word stuck in my throat. So I'll tell him myself.

MIRIAM. [*Angrily.*] You!

BARTLEY. [*Nodding.*] Yes, I. . . . Oh, perfectly quietly—don't be afraid—just as we're talking now. Merely that you've — promised — never to see him again.

MIRIAM. [*Excitedly, as she rises*] Bartley!

BARTLEY. [*Rising too.*] I must insist on that. Really I must.

MIRIAM. There's not the least reason. I'll tell him myself.

BARTLEY. No. I will.

MIRIAM. [*Feverishly.*] It's a matter for me—only me. I'll tell him—when I want to. And I'll see him—whenever I want to!

BARTLEY. [*Doggedly, shaking his head.*] No. You must promise.

MIRIAM. Think what a position you'd be putting me in! As though I'd done something wrong!

BARTLEY. And haven't you?

MIRIAM. No! I was free to do what I liked—I am still—I must feel that I'm free! And I can't look at it like that! Don't put it like that!

BARTLEY. [*Excitedly, beginning to lose control.*] Never mind the way I put it! The words that I use! Just do it—for me!

MIRIAM. You've no right to ask it!

BARTLEY. God in Heaven, I haven't the right!

MIRIAM. I couldn't respect myself for an instant——

BARTLEY. Never mind yourself—think of me!

MIRIAM. I think of you when I think of myself—I think of our future!

BARTLEY. [*Grinding his teeth.*] You know, there are limits. Don't try me too far.

MIRIAM. [*With a cry.*] I see what it is! You *don't* believe me!

BARTLEY. No, no, I don't.

MIRIAM. When I've told you that, in the world, only you——

BARTLEY. All I *do* believe is—that the last time you met—and who knows, perhaps the next time——

MIRIAM. [*Passionately.*] Very well then—very well! These are matters for me! I belong to myself! I am free!

BARTLEY. Precisely. So I am sorry if it hurts your respect—your quaint self-respect—but you'll do what you're told, you hear? You'll obey!

MIRIAM. [*Defiantly.*] I will not!

BARTLEY. [*Moving threateningly towards her.*] But I tell you you will!

MIRIAM. All that's truest and best in me——

BARTLEY. [*Jeering loudly.*] Truest and best! Oh, listen to her! She has been this man's mistress, and talks of what's best! Tells me she loves me—so thinks I'll consent, and won't mind? So *that's* what you've thought of me? Well, you've been wrong—I'm not that sort at all. And you'll never see this creature again—do you hear?

MIRIAM. [*Retreating in alarm.*] Bartley, Bartley, don't get so wild——

BARTLEY. [*Clutching her round the throat.*] And as for your Freedom—to Hell with your freedom—if that's where it leads you! You're my wife—and I'll have no other man near! And you'll swear to me—you who never tell lies—you'll swear——

MIRIAM. [*Clutching his hands.*] Bartley—you're hurting me——

BARTLEY. [*In mad fury.*] Damn you! Swear!

MIRIAM. [*Gasping.*] Bartley!

BARTLEY. [*His fingers tightening round her throat.*] You won't—eh—you won't? I'm to wallow, am I? Lie in the mud, for him to walk over? Yes, yes, I see—that's very pretty. Well, wait a bit, wait—we'll see about that. . . .

[*His grasp round her neck tightens—he is absolutely blind with fury—she gives a wild scream. He unclasps his fingers, and lets her go—she sinks on to her knees. He stares wildly at her for an instant—then rushes out of the room. She rises slowly—the hall-door is heard to bang. She runs to the window, puts her head out, and calls* "BARTLEY, BARTLEY!"*—then she checks herself, and comes back into the room, haggard and dishevelled.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS SLOWLY

ACT III

BARTLEY CHAMBERS'S *private room at the offices of* "Manhood." *The walls are distempered and bare; everything about the place is of the simplest, and there are practically only the barest necessities. In the centre of the back wall, facing the spectator, is a glass door, with an inscription outside,* "MANHOOD. MR. BARTLEY CHAMBERS. PRIVATE." *This door only opens from within, and leads to a passage. The wall slopes to the right; in the middle of it is another door, open at present, which leads to the office, part of which, containing a table or two, chairs and so forth, is visible. In* BARTLEY'S *room, at the back, in the angle formed by the walls, is an old-fashioned washstand, with jug and basin inside, which, when closed, looks like a writing-desk. It is closed now. Against the wall there are cupboards, a couple of shelves with books of reference, a series of files. To the left there is a table,* BARTLEY'S *table, covered with papers and manuscripts under weights; also two or three letter-baskets, all very neat and tidy. Behind this table, a revolving chair, an arm-chair immediately to the right of that, and, beyond, set a little aslant, a horsehair sofa. Against the right wall, and parallel with it, another table with*

chairs. A shabby carpet covers the floor; there is a rug under BARTLEY'S *chair. On the left wall are three rather narrow windows, dingy, and not very clean, and a skylight in the sloping roof.*

When the curtain rises, TOBY *is sitting at the table to the right, going over a brief and making notes on the margin with his fountain pen.* BALDERTON, *an elderly clerk, is busily writing at a table in the outer office. A door is heard to open and close.* BALDERTON *jumps up, and is heard off, talking to* RUTHERFORD.

RUTHERFORD. [*Off.*] Mr. Chambers not yet come?

BALDERTON. [*Off.*] No, sir. Not yet. *Mrs.* Chambers has rung up two or three times, sir.

RUTHERFORD. [*Off.*] Ah.

BALDERTON. [*Off, anxiously.*] Anything wrong, sir?

TOBY. [*Shouting, he had looked up the moment he had heard* RUTHERFORD'S *voice.*] Rutherford!

RUTHERFORD. Hullo! [*He comes in.*]

TOBY. Shut the door. I say, no need to tell Balderton.

RUTHERFORD. [*Who has closed the door, and gone eagerly to* TOBY]. I wasn't. Any news of Bartley?

TOBY. He rang me up half an hour ago, asking me to come here.

RUTHERFORD. Rang you up—from where?

TOBY. I don't know. I've told Miriam, of course.

RUTHERFORD. She thought he might have been

with me. [*He drops into a chair.*] I could cut my tongue out!

TOBY. That infernal drink of yours. But I suppose it was bound to get known, sooner or later.

RUTHERFORD. [*Anxiously.*] Toby—what will he do?

TOBY. *I* don't know. Don't let's talk about it. [*He turns to his brief.*] You'll excuse me, won't you?

[*There is a moment's silence; he reads through his brief again.*

RUTHERFORD. [*Fidgeting.*] I say, Toby—what *will* he do?

TOBY. [*Fretfully, without looking up.*] How the blazes should *I* know?

[*Heavy footsteps are heard in the corridor outside; a key is inserted in the lock of the glass door, and* BARTLEY *comes in. He is still in his evening clothes, but his overcoat is buttoned to his chin, and he wears an old soft hat. He is unshaved, and looks haggard and worn.* TOBY *and* RUTHERFORD *both jump up.*

BARTLEY. [*With a frown at seeing* RUTHERFORD.] Oh——

RUTHERFORD. [*Eagerly, as he goes to him.*] I say, Bartley——

BARTLEY. [*Waving him away.*] Don't. I want to speak to Toby.

RUTHERFORD. Do let me tell you——

BARTLEY. Look here—you marry Fanny.

RUTHERFORD. [*Staring at him.*] Marry Fanny!

BARTLEY. [*Nodding.*] Yes.

RUTHERFORD. [*Energetically.*] I'm damned if I do!

BARTLEY. [*With a grim chuckle.*] He's damned if he does. All right—then just ask Balderton to ring up my house, and tell Parkes to bring me up some clothes, will you?

RUTHERFORD. Yes. But, Bartley, where have you——

BARTLEY. [*Irritably.*] Oh, run along, do, like a good chap. And tell Balderton, too, that I'm out to every one.

[RUTHERFORD *goes into the outer office, and shuts the door.* BARTLEY *takes off his hat and overcoat, and throws them on to a chair; then takes off his coat, his collar and tie, opens the washstand, pours water into the basin, and plunges his head in. He keeps it there for two or three seconds—then comes out, gives himself a shake, opens a drawer, takes out a towel, and proceeds to dry himself.*

BARTLEY. Br-r-r-r—that's good.

TOBY. [*Who has been standing quietly, looking at him.*] Where *have* you been?

BARTLEY. [*Carelessly.*] Oh, walking about—just walking about. [*He gets out a brush, and brushes his hair, standing in front of the little mirror in the cover of the washstand.*] You've heard?

TOBY. Agnes and I were with her ever since three. She was in a dreadful state—wild with anxiety.

BARTLEY. [*Indifferently.*] Ah.

[*He starts washing his hands.*

TOBY. I rang her up, as soon as I heard from you.

BARTLEY. That's all right.

TOBY. What *have* you been doing?

BARTLEY. [*Drying his hands.*] I told you—walking about—just walking about. Fell asleep in a field somewhere—got turned off, and fell asleep somewhere else. Didn't wake till eleven. Had quite a long sleep. [*He has gone to his overcoat, and produces a parcel, which he unties—it contains a collar and tie; he proceeds to put them on, standing in front of the mirror.*] A pretty proceeding for a respectable man, eh?

TOBY. But what possessed you to bolt out of the house like that?

BARTLEY. [*Turning, and looking at him.*] Didn't she tell you?

TOBY. No.

BARTLEY. [*Slowly.*] No man ever came nearer killing a woman than I did last night, Toby.

TOBY. [*Aghast.*] What!

BARTLEY. I had my fingers round her throat—and my one desire was to kill. [*He turns to the mirror again, and adjusts his tie.*] Just as well I cleared out, don't you think? [*He goes to a cupboard, takes out his office-jacket, puts it on, and buttons it.*] So. I look a little more—conventional—now—or shall, at least, when I'm shaved. [*He passes his hand over his chin,*

as he looks into the mirror.] The tie's not up to much. A bit gaudy. The cabman bought that.

TOBY. [*With an impulsive movement towards him.*] Bartley——

BARTLEY. [*With a nervous gesture.*] Wait—wait—don't *you* do the talking—let me. [*He goes to his table, and sits in his chair at the back of it.*] Good of you to come, Toby.

TOBY. [*Affectionately, as he drops into the chair by his side.*] My dear fellow——

BARTLEY. [*Stopping him again.*] Now tell me—how does one set about the divorce business?

TOBY. [*Raising his eyebrows.*] Divorce?

BARTLEY. [*With a shrug.*] What else? One always reads in the papers that the wife left the house. Well—supposing she doesn't—or won't? She probably won't. I can't turn her out—eh?

TOBY. But—but—before we go into that——

BARTLEY. [*Impatiently.*] But we *must* go into that. It's precisely for that I've sent for you. I want to start proceedings at once—well—there *is* the difficulty. Where's she to go to?

TOBY. [*Earnestly.*] I think divorce is quite out of the question, Bartley.

BARTLEY. [*Restlessly.*] I can't help what you think—I don't care what you think! Forgive me, old chap—I don't mean that unkindly. But you're just my lawyer now, you know, and mustn't——

TOBY. I think you might let me——

BARTLEY. No, no, I won't. Quite useless, really.

TOBY. [*Crossing his legs.*] You told me once before I was only your lawyer—and wouldn't listen. It didn't turn out well.

BARTLEY. What do you mean?

TOBY. When you shipped your brother off to Australia.

BARTLEY. [*Impatiently.*] My brother! He had robbed and stolen! What has that to do with us now?

TOBY. He was only a boy. You high-principled men haven't much pity.

BARTLEY. [*Angrily.*] That's abominably unjust—abominably.

TOBY. I don't know. You were in one of your blind furies then—neither your mother nor I could stop you. And the boy became a mere waster.

BARTLEY. [*Getting up nervously, and pacing the room.*] If he'd stopped here, *you* don't know—no one does. And I dare say I was wrong—I've regretted it often enough—good Heaven, haven't I! But what's the sense of bringing *that* in? This is a different matter altogether. My wife—do you understand that—my wife!

TOBY. [*Looking sympathetically at him.*] Yes. It's dreadful—oh, dreadful. But I do wish you'd let me say one word to you. [BARTLEY *makes an angry movement.*] No, no—sit down—just a moment. It commits you to nothing.

[BARTLEY *mutters sulkily, goes to his table, and sits; he shifts things restlessly from one place to another.*

TOBY. I won't waste time telling you how sorry I am. But I'm a lawyer, and see a good deal. And look here—it's rather a horrid thing to say, perhaps—but do you think very many women—do you think there *are* many women—who're what we call "faithful" to their husbands?

BARTLEY. [*Furiously, as he bangs his fist on the table.*] What!!!

TOBY. [*Almost apologetically.*] It sounds beastly, of course. But I mean it. A good number keep on the track. There are some who've never been tempted. But then—let's be honest—those are the dull ones. And the others, who *do* run straight—they've been afraid to, that's all. They've wanted to, often enough. They've just been afraid.

BARTLEY. [*With indignant scorn.*] That's your man-of-the-world talk. Don't give it to me—it's no use to me. And I don't believe it, and never will.

TOBY. And yet there's some sense in it. I'm not defending them, mind you.

BARTLEY. In any event it doesn't apply. Last night I swallowed everything—I did—and *you* don't know the things she said to me last night! I sat there, and swallowed them. All I asked was that she should give this man up. She refused.

TOBY. Come, come, let's be accurate. You told her she must never see him again.

BARTLEY. And wouldn't *you*, eh—wouldn't you? Just tell me what *you* would have done?

TOBY. I'm not married. I've been afraid to, perhaps.

But—Bartley, there's this. You've had *your* fling—other men's wives——

BARTLEY. Not since I've been married—no man could have run straighter! Well—that's enough, isn't it? You've had your say—and pretty poor stuff it was. Now the only question is—will you act for me in the divorce?

TOBY. [*Shortly.*] No.

BARTLEY. [*With a shrug.*] Very well, then—I'll get some one else. Whom do you recommend?

TOBY. There's no lack of lawyers. But I don't want you to think I've been telling *her* she was right. Fact is, this freedom business went to her head. We educate women, and expect them to sew tapestry. They won't.

BARTLEY. [*Grimly.*] Isn't there just the *least* bit of difference between sewing tapestry—and taking a lover?

TOBY. *Of course* there's a difference! And I've told you I'm not defending *her*. But you've praised Agnes up to the skies—Agnes, with her fatherless baby! Would the parsons be less severe on her than on Miriam?

BARTLEY. Agnes was free to do what she liked—she wasn't married. [*He rises.*] Very well—I see you're no use to me, Toby.

[*He moves away.*

TOBY. [*Desperately, as he jumps up and goes after him.*] She has been a most admirable wife! No mother could have been more devoted!

BARTLEY. [*Bitterly.*] The "admirable wife" is good. I see the humour of it.

TOBY. [*Eagerly and volubly.*] It's *we* who've been filling them up with their rights, and all that, in the paper. Here, in this very room! And what *are* their rights, and what aren't they? *I* don't know—no one does. At any rate, they've never had them since the world began. It's we men who laid down what honour stood for—and because they were silent, we thought they consented. But *did* they, ever? Most women lie when their husbands find out—they all lie—we force them to lie. You want to divorce Miriam—because she—didn't!

BARTLEY. No—she certainly did *not*. She told me, in so many words, that it didn't matter! [*He gives himself a little shake, and goes on, more calmly and a little wearily.*] Toby, the things you've been saying don't help. And they are none of them true—not one. It's not this that the paper's been working for—we never said men should be sheep! But I don't want to argue—and won't. No, no, don't say any more! I'll tell you about the other things you must do for me, since you won't help me in the divorce.

[*The door to the right has opened, and* MIRIAM *has come in, while he was speaking his last sentence. She stops, and looks at him. She also is haggard and worn, but her manner is perfectly calm, and betrays not the least sign of emotion.*

BARTLEY. [*With a frown, as he sees her.*] Oh——

TOBY. [*Going eagerly to her.*] Miriam——

MIRIAM. [*Quietly, with her eyes on* BARTLEY.] Divorce?

TOBY. Yes, that's what he wants.

MIRIAM. [*To* BARTLEY.] Where have you been, all night?

BARTLEY. [*Fidgeting.*] Oh, that doesn't matter. Look here, I'd rather you didn't stop, if you don't mind.

MIRIAM. [*Still in the same quiet tone.*] I want to speak to you, Bartley.

TOBY. [*Turning to the glass door.*] Of course. And I'll leave you.

BARTLEY. [*Stopping him.*] No, no, I won't have that. If I must, I must—though I don't know why—but, anyhow, there's not the least reason why *you* shouldn't be here.

TOBY. [*Releasing himself.*] Oh, *do* be sensible! This is quite childish. I'll go to the office, see to a thing or two, and come back in an hour. And, if you're still wanting a divorce, I'll tell you what you have to do.

[*He shakes* BARTLEY *off, and goes, through the glass door.* BARTLEY *is very vexed—he shrugs his shoulders, muttering,* "If I am still! Too ridiculous!" *returns to his table, and sits.* MIRIAM *sits on the sofa. There is silence for a moment. She has her eyes steadily fixed on* BARTLEY, *who is fidgeting with the papers before him, and carefully avoids looking at her.*

MIRIAM. [*Quietly.*] You really want to divorce me?

BARTLEY. Of course, of course. That's the only thing to do.

MIRIAM. I see. . . . You came very near strangling me last night.

BARTLEY. [*Muttering.*] I'm dreadfully sorry. And ashamed, of course.

MIRIAM. Did you really think that what I had done deserved that?

BARTLEY. I didn't think at all. I was completely off my head.

MIRIAM. Or that it deserves—divorce?

BARTLEY. That's what the law was made for—isn't it? And this is precisely a case. And anyhow, it's no good talking about it. The point is—what are we to do?

MIRIAM. Do?

BARTLEY. I mean, one of us must go away. We can't possibly live under the same roof, can we, while proceedings are pending?

MIRIAM. You'd like me to go?

BARTLEY. I think that would be best. I'd make everything comfortable for you, of course.

MIRIAM. Thank you. Where should I go?

BARTLEY. I don't know—that's just the difficulty. Your mother?

MIRIAM. [*Shaking her head.*] No. But I *might* stay with Agnes.

BARTLEY. [*Eagerly, as he looks at her for the first*

time.] That's a splendid idea. To-day, don't you think?

MIRIAM. To-day?

BARTLEY. Well, if you wouldn't mind.—What's that you're wearing round your neck?

MIRIAM. There was a mark.

BARTLEY. Oh, I'm dreadfully sorry.

MIRIAM. It will soon go. You'd like me to-day——

BARTLEY. That seems the simplest thing, really.

MIRIAM. Perhaps. You don't mind, of course, taking me from my children?

BARTLEY. We can't help that, can we? But you shall see them, whenever you want to.

MIRIAM. Just now and again, furtively, when you're not in the house?

BARTLEY. Whenever you want to—whenever you want to.

MIRIAM. And if you re-married?

BARTLEY. Oh, that isn't likely!

MIRIAM. But if you did—another woman would mother my babies?

BARTLEY. [*Restlessly, as he fidgets with his papers again.*] All that, as I've said, can't be helped. You should have thought about that, before. But I'll never re-marry—never.

MIRIAM. [*In the same quiet, steady voice, that never varies.*] You remember when Daphne was born?

[BARTLEY *merely gives a shrug, but doesn't answer, and turns to his papers.*

MIRIAM. The doctors gave me up, didn't they?

BARTLEY. [*Fretfully.*] Why harrow ourselves—with reminiscences?

MIRIAM. No. All I want to remind you is—that I very nearly died for you—then.

BARTLEY. [*More and more irritably.*] It was a dreadful time—terrible. But that's in the past. Why talk of the past?

MIRIAM. For three days and nights you sat by my bedside.

[BARTLEY *takes up a pencil fretfully, and makes a note on a manuscript.*

MIRIAM. You sat there, holding my hand. I thought I was dying—I was ready to die. I had brought your child into the world.

BARTLEY. [*Flinging the pencil down.*] I can't imagine why you recall these things. They're over and done with. Why speak of them now?

MIRIAM. Merely because I want to ask—whether those days and nights don't count?

BARTLEY. [*Banging his fist on the table.*] Count! In Heaven's name—for what?

MIRIAM. To-day you propose to take me away from my children.

BARTLEY. [*Dropping his papers, and bending forward.*] You know, this isn't fair. And there's no sense in it. Do you think—after what happened last night—that life is possible for us—on your terms under your conditions?

MIRIAM. No. Evidently it is not.

BARTLEY. Very well, then. Why drag up the past?

MIRIAM. Because—it doesn't seem to have occurred to you—that I am fond of my children.

BARTLEY. [*Banging the table again, and springing to his feet.*] Look here, so am I. And they're mine, as much as yours. You had the pain and the suffering, as you brought them into the world—but I, as I sat there, listening to every sound—I suffered as much as you did—more, perhaps, because it was *you* who were bearing the pain. And you forgot your children when you fell in love—with *him!*

MIRIAM. [*Still with the same unruffled calm.*] I didn't fall in love with him.

BARTLEY. Enough, at least, to give yourself to him!

MIRIAM. Yes.

BARTLEY. [*Violently as he faces her.*] Very well then—very well—is there any more to be said?

MIRIAM. Bartley, do you think we women are stocks and stones? Do you think we, like you, have no sudden weakness, or impulse? Does that make us vile, unfit to look after our children—does it mean we can't love our husband?

BARTLEY. Yes, it *does*—that's just what it *does* mean! And supposing—oh, I can't say it!

[*He writhes, and turns away.*

MIRIAM. [*Unflinchingly.*] You mean, if I'd had a child by him?

BARTLEY. [*Breathing hard.*] Yes!

MIRIAM. I didn't *want* a child by him. But—if I had—couldn't you have loved it—*because* it was mine?

BARTLEY. [*Breaking away.*] My God! No! No!

MIRIAM. Its being *mine* would have made no difference?

BARTLEY. None! Absolutely none!

MIRIAM. Well, it would have, to me. The fact of its being *your* child—the child of the man I loved. And loved, it seems, with a greater and finer love than you ever felt for me.

BARTLEY. [*Fiercely, as he faces her again.*] That's a lie, and you know it! No man has ever loved a woman more than I did you. Your treachery—come, come, let us call it by its name—has been vile and detestable. And it makes no difference, however you gloss it over. All the things you've said make no difference. You want me to believe in your love for me, and to be free to give yourself to another man. I nearly killed you for that last night—and I'm not at all sure that you didn't *deserve* to be killed. I've always wanted women to be free—and I do still—and by Heaven that's why the paper shall go on! But *this* sort of thing I've kicked out—sent it round to the dustbin—as I do to-day. And when a woman believes in it, and advocates it—then she's *not* fit to bring up children—and deserves to be divorced and discarded—as I divorce and discard you!

MIRIAM. [*Who has listened quite unmoved, the*

emotion fading out of her face.] Very well—you divorce and discard me. What happens then?—I mean, to me?

BARTLEY. [*Sulkily, as he goes back to his table, and sits.*] Eve can divorce Laurence—and you can marry him.

MIRIAM. [*After an amazed glance at him.*] You *want* me to marry Laurence?

BARTLEY. [*Taking up a bundle of documents and looking at them.*] That's the thing that's usually done.

MIRIAM. [*Nodding.*] I see.

BARTLEY. And as you and he apparently think alike on these matters, you'll have no difficulty with him.

MIRIAM. Well, of course, that will be very pleasant and comfortable. And I suppose you'll be quite generous—as regards an allowance, and all that?

BARTLEY. [*Still fiddling about with his papers.*] Toby can act for you, as he won't for me.

MIRIAM. He won't?

BARTLEY. No.

MIRIAM. That's a pity. But I'm sure you'll be *very* generous as regards the money.

BARTLEY. That's probably meant as a sneer. But it doesn't affect me. Not in the least. I've told you, I'll make everything as smooth for you as I can.

[MIRIAM *is about to retort, when* BALDERTON *comes in. His manner is rather awkward and constrained as he goes to* BARTLEY.

BALDERTON. Parkes has brought your clothes, sir.

BARTLEY. Very well.

BALDERTON. Is there any message for him, sir?

BARTLEY. No.

BALDERTON. Shall I bring the bag in, sir?

BARTLEY. Yes. No. Later.

BALDERTON. [*With a little stammering hesitation.*] Mr. Targill asked me to tell you, sir, that he's in the office.

BARTLEY. Mr. Targill!

BALDERTON. [*Looking a trifle sheepishly at him.*] Yes, sir. He wants to know whether you'll see him when you're disengaged, sir.

BARTLEY. [*After a moment's pause.*] Very well. When I ring, Balderton.

BALDERTON. Yes, sir, I'll tell him.

[*He goes. There is silence again.* BARTLEY *fidgets with his papers, evidently waiting for* MIRIAM *to go.*

MIRIAM. You mean to see him?

BARTLEY. [*Shortly.*] Yes.

MIRIAM. That's much the best.

BARTLEY. I have to tell him about the paper.

MIRIAM. You want me to go?

BARTLEY. That seems more—decent.

MIRIAM. Why? Are you afraid to speak to him—before me?

BARTLEY. [*Angrily.*] Afraid—why afraid? It's not that, at all. And, besides, you may be perfectly certain I shan't say a word that doesn't concern the paper. Or let him, either.

MIRIAM. In that case I might as well stay. I've been a contributor to the paper, you know—I'd like to hear your views. And after all, as he's to be my husband—— [BARTLEY *swears under his breath, and rings violently.*] You'll tell him, won't you, that you mean to provide for me? Because of course I've nothing of my own.

BARTLEY. You needn't worry about *that.*

MIRIAM. Oh no, I don't. Only Eve has nothing either, you see—so he'll have to provide for her. And it will make matters so much easier, won't it, my being a sort of—heiress?

[BARTLEY *merely shrugs his shoulders, and takes no notice, burying himself in his papers.* LAURENCE *comes in, hurriedly and nervously—he pauses for a moment on the threshold, and seems surprised, and a little annoyed, at seeing* MIRIAM. *He shuts the door and goes quickly to* BARTLEY. *There is not the least trace of yesterday's truculence about him, but only, as it were, an eager and almost bashful friendliness.* MIRIAM *has her back almost turned to him, and doesn't stir.*

LAURENCE. [*Eagerly.*] I've come to——

BARTLEY. [*Stopping him abruptly, and waving him away.*] Please sit down—over there. [*He motions to the table.*] Over there. I want to speak to you about the paper. Nothing but the paper. Please understand that. [LAURENCE *hasn't moved—he tries to speak*

—BARTLEY *stops him.*] Sit down, sit down. Don't let's have a fuss. Or a scene. There was quite enough of that last night. [LAURENCE *gives a little shrug, and goes slowly to the table—he sits, as far from* MIRIAM *as he can, and facing* BARTLEY.] This is merely a business talk. About the paper. I want it to go on.

LAURENCE. [*Scarcely above a murmur.*] At least I'm glad of that.

BARTLEY. *I* go out of it, of course.

LAURENCE. And not I?

BARTLEY. [*Shortly.*] No.

LAURENCE. Why?

BARTLEY. That's *my* affair, and we needn't discuss it. I turned the thing, as you know, into a small private company. There's quite enough working capital—and it will soon be paying its way. I hold nearly all the shares. I shall arrange with Toby to have these divided among the editorial staff.

LAURENCE. Me too?

BARTLEY. That concerns Toby. All that I ask—and I fancy I am entitled to ask it—is that you, who of course become editor again——

LAURENCE. [*Surprised.*] I?

BARTLEY. You're the only man who can do it. I'm merely thinking about the paper. But I want it run on my lines. They were clearly indicated; you know them.

LAURENCE. [*Hesitating.*] But — if I'm to be Editor——

MIRIAM. [*Without turning her head.*] He *is* entitled to ask that, Laurence.

LAURENCE. [*After a moment.*] Very well. I'll do my best.

BARTLEY. I have your distinct undertaking?

LAURENCE. Yes.

BARTLEY. All right then. I clear out of this room to-day. Have my name painted out of the door, taken off the front sheet. Otherwise let everything go on as before. You understand?

LAURENCE. Yes.

BARTLEY. [*With a gesture of dismissal.*] Very well. Then that's all we have to say to each other.

[*He has scarcely looked at* LAURENCE *through all this—now he definitely turns away, and proceeds to sort his papers.*

LAURENCE. Wait. There's the money I owe you.

BARTLEY. [*Without looking up.*] It was all in connection with the paper. And I—apologize—for having mentioned it.

LAURENCE. [*Quietly.*] You needn't. But look here—I've a reversion. When an aunt of mine dies, I come into a couple of thousand. She's not very old, and I don't want her to die—but the thing has a value. I'll have it transferred to. you.

BARTLEY. [*Who has listened with every sign of impatience.*] That's simply ridiculous. I didn't know what I was saying yesterday. And do you think I care a hang about the money?

LAURENCE. But I do. I care a very great deal. And I can't allow——

BARTLEY. [*Irritably.*] Oh, do stop this, please. I'm a very rich man, and you're a poor one, and it would annoy me profoundly to take your reversion. Please leave it there. I've withdrawn my remark of yesterday—so that's ended.

LAURENCE. But all the same——

MIRIAM. [*Again without turning her head.*] You must do what he tells you, Laurence.

LAURENCE. [*After a moment, and a rather displeased glance at her.*] Very well. I accept. But it's generous.

BARTLEY. [*Roughly.*] Heavens above, I have no wish to be generous. Please don't imagine that. It's mere common sense. So that's all. Good day.

[*He plunges himself into his papers. There is a moment's silence.* LAURENCE *gets up and turns to the door—then, impulsively, with uncontrollable eagerness and excitement, hastens to* BARTLEY.

LAURENCE. I can't go like that—I can't. You evidently don't intend to see me again——

BARTLEY. [*Grimly.*] You may be quite sure of *that.* I wouldn't have seen you now, only I thought *she'd* go if I did. Well, she wouldn't.

MIRIAM. [*Quietly.*] No—I wouldn't. What have *you* to say, Laurence?

LAURENCE. There's nothing I *can* say—except that I never imagined—he'd take it—like this. [BARTLEY

makes a passionate movement.] No, no, don't be angry. Look here, we've been friends——

BARTLEY. [*Scornfully.*] You!

LAURENCE. Yes, I. I valued your friendship. I wouldn't have thrown it away—for any woman in the world.

MIRIAM. Thank you.

LAURENCE. *She* knows it too. I want you to know it. Of course everything sounds ghastly when one tries to say it.

BARTLEY. Then why try? Do you think I care?

LAURENCE. [*Still hurriedly and deprecatingly.*] Last night I got angry too. But—when I came home—and heard how anxious she was——

MIRIAM. [*Almost to herself.*] I had visions of him lying in a ditch, with his throat cut.

BARTLEY. Very harrowing—very. But my throat's all right, thank you. [*To* LAURENCE.] Well—haven't you finished?

LAURENCE. I was heart-broken, simply. I'd have given everything in the world that this shouldn't have happened.

MIRIAM. [*Quietly.*] Don't be such a coward, Laurence.

BARTLEY. You hear what she says? And she's right. Don't be such a coward. You knew what you were doing. It pleased you to take my wife—and you took her. At least don't bleat about your friendship for me.

LAURENCE. [*Wearily.*] And yet it's true. The

absurd things *are* true sometimes—this is. It's where theories come to grief. Well—I'll go.

[*He turns, and moves to the door.*

BARTLEY. For Heaven's sake, do. And perhaps *she* will too. [*He picks up his papers again.*

MIRIAM. [*Quietly.*] He means to divorce me, Laurence.

LAURENCE. [*At the door, turning round.*] What!!!

MIRIAM. Yes. He has made up his mind.

LAURENCE. [*Hurrying excitedly to* BARTLEY.] Bartley, Bartley!

BARTLEY. [*Violently.*] Don't address me like that! And get out! It's no business of yours!

LAURENCE. [*Quite beside himself.*] Divorce *her!* Miriam! Good Heaven—what for?

BARTLEY. You'll find out, later. Don't you worry. You'll hear.

LAURENCE. Do what you like with me. But you *can't*—divorce Miriam!

BARTLEY. Can't I, though—can't I? We'll see about that.

LAURENCE. The blame is all mine.

MIRIAM. That's not true.

BARTLEY. It doesn't matter whether it's true or not. It doesn't matter in the least. And she has told me everything—she hasn't spared me. The rest concerns the lawyers.

LAURENCE. Don't bring *them* in. You can't. And there are her children. For this mere trifle——

BARTLEY. [*Furiously.*] What!

LAURENCE. [*Humbly.*] I beg your pardon. I didn't mean that. But look here—we've discussed all this—the position of women—over and over again—haven't we? *You* have. It's not fair to look at it now—as though we were ordinary people!

BARTLEY. I daresay *you* aren't—or she, very likely—but I am. Oh, quite. And I do the ordinary thing. [*He waves his hand in dismissal.*

LAURENCE. [*Persistently.*] But, Bartley, this *isn't* the ordinary thing! It's wicked, it's monstrous!

BARTLEY. [*Moving things about on his table.*] I'm sorry if it doesn't meet with Mr. Targill's approval. But we can't help that—can we?

LAURENCE. I'll make what amends I can. Run the paper as you want it—do anything. Be satisfied with that. For God's sake, have pity!

BARTLEY. [*Snarling.*] For whom? For her? She doesn't want it. For you? Why?

LAURENCE. [*In despair.*] Even *you've* always said in the paper that women should be free!

BARTLEY. I have—and I hope *you'll* go on saying it. But that doesn't mean we're all to turn into pigs. And it doesn't help women's freedom for one friend to betray another.

LAURENCE. I haven't, I haven't! Oh, there are things one can't say, of course.

MIRIAM. [*Quietly.*] Say what you like. I've told him the absolute truth.

LAURENCE. [*Looking at her.*] If she really has——

MIRIAM. Oh yes.

LAURENCE. [*Turning to* BARTLEY.] Very well then —if you *do* know . . . a calamity, of course, that it should be—you and I. That *is* a calamity. But, otherwise—*is* it so very important? [BARTLEY *howls at him—he goes on hurriedly.*] No, no, understand me—I mean, to people like us. Because, after all, we're not grocers, or stockbrokers!

BARTLEY. We're men—just as they are. Men—you forgot that. And I'll act like a man. You didn't. You've behaved like a cur.

MIRIAM. [*Almost critically.*] That's rather absurd.

BARTLEY. It's my point of view. And I'm not losing my temper. I just want him to know.

LAURENCE. [*Hotly.*] That's all right—and I don't mind your saying it—if that's what you think. But whether you're *entitled* to think it is quite another matter.

BARTLEY. [*Looking defiantly at him.*] A cur. A mere, pitiful cur.

LAURENCE. Don't talk such nonsense. She wanted a lover, and I chanced to be there. That's the whole business.

BARTLEY. [*Jumping up and yelling.*] You blackguard! Foul blackguard!

LAURENCE. [*Doggedly.*] I'm nothing of the sort. You'd have done just the same. And it's all too stupid. You haven't bought her—you don't lead her about on a string!

BARTLEY. [*With a violent movement, dropping the*

papers he held in his hand, and rushing round the table.] No, no, I won't stand that!

[MIRIAM *rises, goes to the edge of the table, and intercepts him.*

MIRIAM. [*Soothingly.*] Sit down, Bartley—sit down. That sort of thing doesn't help. Why can't you talk quietly, without calling each other names? And you don't want Balderton to hear. Besides, I'm not Helen of Troy—there's no need for bloodshed.

BARTLEY. [*Still trembling with excitement.*] I want him to go. If he doesn't——

MIRIAM. Just one moment. Be reasonable—please—just one moment. [BARTLEY *drops exhaustedly into his chair, muttering furiously to himself.*] And you shouldn't say such things, Laurence. Of course they provoke him.

LAURENCE. [*Sulkily; he had merely shrugged his shoulders at* BARTLEY'S *outburst.*] I'd no wish to do that. But look how he's treating me! And, after all, what have I done?

BARTLEY. Let him go, I say! Let him go!

MIRIAM. [*Soothingly.*] He shall, in a minute. Laurence, Bartley suggests that Eve should divorce you, and that you should marry me.

LAURENCE. [*Completely staggered.*] What!!!

MIRIAM. [*Nodding.*] Yes. Eve will do anything you tell her, you know. And Bartley's quite prepared

to make me a handsome allowance. [*She turns to him.*] Aren't you?

[BARTLEY *buries himself feverishly in his papers and takes no notice.*

LAURENCE. [*Fretfully.*] This is ridiculous.

MIRIAM. [*Pleasantly.*] Why, Laurence — why? Bartley's very anxious that everything should pass off pleasantly. You'll be the co-respondent—and nice co-respondents always marry the lady. Bartley'd like it. He doesn't make it a condition—but he'd like it. [*She turns to him.*] Wouldn't you?

BARTLEY. [*Without looking up.*] It's a matter for you both. Not necessary to discuss it before me.

MIRIAM. [*Mildly.*] Oh, Bartley—why not? It's a kind of business arrangement, isn't it? Well, Laurence, what do you say?

LAURENCE. [*Angrily, as he shifts from one foot to the other.*] I say it's insane. Why should Eve divorce me? *She* doesn't want to—*I* don't want her to. It wouldn't help matters in the least. And I won't hear of it.

MIRIAM. [*Thoughtfully.*] How very disappointing. It looks as though I should be left in the cold. I'm afraid you're not as rigid a moralist as Bartley is, Laurence.

LAURENCE. We don't care about each other, you and I. We've never pretended to. You don't love *me!*

MIRIAM. No, no, of course not—but since *he* wishes it. Won't you do this little thing for him?

LAURENCE. Why the devil *should* he wish it? Since it's *him* you love!

MIRIAM. Well, you see, he won't believe that.

BARTLEY. [*Breaking down, dropping his hands on the table, and his head on his hands.*] Believe it! Oh, I beg of you both—enough! It's more than I can bear!

LAURENCE. [*Deeply moved at his distress, and hastening to him.*] Bartley, I see what it is. You've a wrong idea altogether. Her pride, I suppose—been walking on stilts, and wouldn't come down. But I assure you *she* doesn't want you to divorce her!

MIRIAM. No, I don't. And he gave me a chance yesterday. He told me he'd forgive me if I promised never to see you again.

LAURENCE. [*Staring at her in amazement.*] And you wouldn't?

MIRIAM. Not because I was ordered to. No.

LAURENCE. But that's *too* silly!

MIRIAM. [*Thoughtfully.*] You think that?

LAURENCE. Of course I do! Of course! Quite idiotic! [*He turns to* BARTLEY.] Of *course* she won't see me again, Bartley! And, at any rate, I swear to you I'll never see her!

[BARTLEY, *his head still bowed on his hands, mutters incoherently,* "I've nothing to do with you! I've nothing to do with you!"

MIRIAM. [*After a sympathetic glance at* BARTLEY.] But, Laurence—my freedom——

LAURENCE. [*Roughly.*] Oh, blow your freedom! You're his wife—and you love him! Why not do what he asks you?

MIRIAM. I will.

LAURENCE. [*Eagerly, to* BARTLEY.] There, Bartley —there! you hear that?

[BARTLEY *half lifts his head and looks at* MIRIAM.

MIRIAM. [*Nodding.*] I say I will. I'll obey, in every particular.

BARTLEY. [*Suspiciously.*] You mean that?

MIRIAM. I came here to-day, intending to say it.

BARTLEY. Then why didn't you?

MIRIAM. [*Carelessly.*] Oh, I meant to try first. . . . And you seemed so set on a divorce. But I'd rather you didn't. *I* don't want to be divorced, any more than he does. Besides, you'd find it awkward —the servants take a deal of looking after. And the children would be a trouble. You see, they're used to me.

BARTLEY. [*Looking away from her, and almost muttering to himself.*] I don't know whether I'm to take this seriously.

MIRIAM. Oh yes—I'm quite in earnest. As Laurence says, I've been wrong.

LAURENCE. [*Who has moved away, and now stands by the door to the right, muttering to himself.*] I said —I said——

BARTLEY. [*Still awkwardly, and without looking at her*]. It's a pity you couldn't last night . . .

MIRIAM. Last night I was headstrong and foolish —undeniably foolish. You offered me your forgiveness last night—I beg for it now. I'll go on my knees, if you like. Does that satisfy you?

BARTLEY. [*Hesitatingly.*] . . . I suppose that it must . . .

MIRIAM. Very well, then. And you won't divorce me?

BARTLEY. . . . No. . . .

MIRIAM. [*Cheerfully.*] Thanks very much. [*She turns, and sees* LAURENCE, *who is still standing in his corner, not quite knowing what to do, whether to go or stay.*] Dear me, Laurence—you still there? That was tactless.

LAURENCE. [*Looking rather resentfully at her.*] I'm sorry. But I wasn't sure whether you had quite finished with me.

MIRIAM. Oh, yes, thanks. And I'm really obliged to you—you've been splendid. And you'll have no difficulty in running the paper on Bartley's lines—you see, you *do* agree with him, really.

LAURENCE. You know well enough that's not true. But theories and ideas go for nothing—when a man's suffering.

MIRIAM. That's what Mrs. Collins said yesterday.

LAURENCE. I don't know what Mrs. Collins said yesterday. I only know that I'm not ashamed of a single word *I've* said.

MIRIAM. [*Sincerely.*] No, no, why should you be?

And I mean that—really, I do. Good-bye. My regards to Eve.

LAURENCE. Bartley——

BARTLEY. [*With a gesture.*] Oh, go away, please! Don't start again—on me!

LAURENCE. No. But just this. I bear the punishment—and I'm glad I *do* bear it. That's all. Good-bye.

[*With a quiet look at both of them, he goes through the door to the right.*

MIRIAM. [*As she moves to the table and picks up her bag, preparatory to leaving.*] He has been very useful. I'm afraid it wasn't pleasant for you, his stopping here—but I was anxious that you should know. [*She picks up her bag from the table.*] Are you coming home to lunch?

BARTLEY. I can't. I've to tell Toby about the paper.

MIRIAM. Very well. You won't be late. I've some shopping to do this afternoon—but I'll be in to tea. By the way, don't forget that you've promised to look in at Millby's about that old silver jug—they're keeping it for me—the Batten girl's wedding, you know. Make them show you the two—the one's fifteen guineas, and the other twelve.

[*She goes to the glass door.*

BARTLEY. [*Getting up and going to her.*] One minute. I don't know what you've got at the back of your head, But *I*'m quite willing — to let bygones be bygones.

MIRIAM. [*At the door, speaking over her shoulder.*] That's very good of you.

BARTLEY. Never mind whether I'm good or not. I'm willing to forget, that's all.

MIRIAM. [*With a gentle shrug.*] Why not?

BARTLEY. And how about you?

MIRIAM. Me? [*She half turns round.*

BARTLEY. Yes, you. All this is unnatural—first your violent protest—and then this sudden meekness. What does it mean?

MIRIAM. [*Quietly.*] Merely that I don't want to be taken from my children.

BARTLEY. [*Nodding.*] I see. And I, I suppose, am a brute to have suggested it?

MIRIAM. It certainly never entered my head that you'd do that.

BARTLEY. Perhaps you'll tell me what else I could do?

MIRIAM. [*Turning completely round and facing him, a note of passion coming into her voice for the first time.*] What else! You were willing to drag me to a Law-Court—and then fling me to him!

BARTLEY. [*Muttering angrily.*] Fling—fling—what d'you mean, fling? All I said was——

MIRIAM. You were willing that I should pass out of your life—pass out completely, as though I never had been! You to whom I went as a girl, to whom I've borne children! You'd have let them cry for me—and I not there—my two babies! And all this because, for one moment, I had looked away—from you!

BARTLEY. [*Angrily.*] You've no right to say that. I offered yesterday——

MIRIAM. I told you *why* I refused—let you look into me—oh, Bartley, I told you I loved you, you *knew* that I loved you—but that wasn't enough. The years we had lived together, the memories we had in common—all that didn't matter. I was to be sent away—handed over—to the first passer-by.

BARTLEY. [*Shouting.*] But it's nonsense, all this—sheer nonsense!

MIRIAM. *Is* it, Bartley—is it? The Law, that you're so fond of, allows you to hit the mother through her children. You'd have taken them from me—because that's the Right—of the Male . . . Very well—I obey. And you shall have no cause for complaint in the future. There shall be no other man in my life—but—neither—shall there be you.

BARTLEY. [*Nodding sulkily.*] Yes—I'm not surprised. I half expected that.

MIRIAM. [*Passionately.*] At least, so much of Freedom may be left me! I have to *buy* the permission to stay with my children—I need not pay with myself!

BARTLEY. That shall be as you will. I made no conditions—I stick to that. Only—let me tell you—every word you have said—is monstrously cruel and unjust.

MIRIAM. [*Coldly.*] You think that?

BARTLEY. Most emphatically I do. In plain

English, I've been faithful to you, and you haven't to me. That's all it amounts to.

MIRIAM. [*Sorrowfully.*] Faithful, Bartley! Oh, is there only *one* kind of fidelity—our miserable body! And *have* you been faithful—you who were willing to send me away? *You* might have committed every crime in the world—and I'd have stood by you!

BARTLEY. So would I — you know that — but this——

MIRIAM. Yes—this—that means so little—is the greatest crime of all—to the Male! [*She turns to the door.*] Well—in time you may think differently. Time does strange things.

BARTLEY. [*Defiantly.*] I shall never think differently —never—be quite sure of that! And these things you've been saying—I can't shuffle words, I can't pick up arguments—but I know they're not true. They're simply not human—men and women couldn't go on existing—the whole world would have to change! I've been a good husband and father—and you weren't content with just being my wife. You've done wrong—and you can't see it. That's tragedy enough—but at least don't think you're entitled—to put the blame—on me!

MIRIAM. [*Calmly.*] Let us leave it there, Bartley—and take up our lives again. There is much we can do. [*She turns to the door.*

BARTLEY. [*Bitterly.*] And this great love you spoke of! What of that?

MIRIAM. [*Turning and looking at him.*] It is there

waiting. It is there! . . . [*She turns from him, and opens the door.*] Shall I send the car for you?

BARTLEY. [*Sulkily, as he moves away.*] No, no.

MIRIAM. You'll ring if you want it. And I shall expect you to tea.

[*She goes, and shuts the door.* BARTLEY *stands there for a moment, muttering to himself,* "Damned nonsense—that's what it is—damned nonsense!" *then goes to his table, sits, passes his hands wearily over his brow, and rings. After a moment* BALDERTON *comes in with the bag.*

BALDERTON. The clothes, sir?

BARTLEY. Yes.

BALDERTON. Shall I take them out, sir?

BARTLEY. No, no, I'll do it myself. Just put the bag down.

BALDERTON. Very well, sir. [*He crosses over and puts the bag on a chair by the table.*] Anything else, sir?

BARTLEY. No, no, thanks. By the way, I'm in to no one except Mr. Parning. You understand?

BALDERTON. Yes, sir. Yes.

[*He goes, and shuts the door,* BARTLEY *rises slowly, still muttering to himself, stretches and yawns, goes to the bag, and begins to take out the clothes. There is a knock at the glass door. He stops, and lifts his head eagerly. The knock is repeated, and* EVE, *off, calls* "Bartley!"

BARTLEY. [*Happily.*] Eve!

[*He hastens to the door and flings it open.* EVE *comes in. He shuts the door, goes eagerly to her, and holds out both his hands.*

BARTLEY. Oh, I'm so glad you've come! Eve! I'm so glad!

EVE. [*Shyly.*] I thought you'd like——

BARTLEY. Miriam's been here—Toby—all telling me I've been wrong!

EVE. I met Miriam on the stairs.

BARTLEY. Did she say anything?

EVE. No. She just smiled, and nodded.

BARTLEY. You should have heard her—oh, you should have heard her! It's I am to blame—only I! I who loved her—*you* know how I loved her! And this—this! Wouldn't *you* have thought it impossible?

EVE. [*As she sits on the sofa.*] He's my husband.

BARTLEY. [*Sitting beside her.*] Yes, yes, of course—you've suffered too. Did *you* suspect——

EVE. [*Very simply.*] Oh, I knew. I always get to know, sooner or later.

BARTLEY. [*Dropping her hand.*] Always! Then there have been others!

EVE. Oh yes. Before we'd been married a year, there was—another.

BARTLEY. Eve!

EVE. And there have been more—since then.

BARTLEY. And you have endured it—allowed it!

EVE. What can one do? I've been very miserable, of course. But it happens to so many women.

BARTLEY. And you've actually been able—to go on seeing Miriam—although you knew . . .

EVE. Oh yes.

BARTLEY. You could—you could—do that!

EVE. Oh, Bartley, what difference could it make—whether I saw her, or not?

BARTLEY. Was that why you broke down last night?

EVE. I don't often give way. I was dreadfully ashamed. You see, I love him.

BARTLEY. Notwithstanding all, you still love him?

EVE. One loves, because one loves. I suppose women are like that. At least some women. They just cry a little, and go on darning the children's clothes.

BARTLEY. [*Nervously.*] Then *you* think I've been wrong, too?

EVE. [*Very earnestly.*] Oh no, Bartley, I don't. It's different for a man. And I'm very sorry. I told Laurence, when he was so sure you wouldn't mind . . .

BARTLEY. He really, really could think——

EVE. Oh yes. You've no idea how unhappy he was last night. I've never seen him so unhappy. He has very few man friends—he has never cared for any one as much as he does for you.

BARTLEY. [*Throwing up his hands.*] That's beyond everything!

EVE. You see, they're different, Miriam and he. They're both so clever. They talk such a lot.

BARTLEY. [*Bitterly.*] Yes—full of wonderful reasons—and so forth. Well—we suffer.

EVE. It's hard on you, Bartley. You didn't deserve it. I'm dreadfully sorry.

BARTLEY. Miriam spoke—about you and me.

EVE. Did she? That was silly of her.

BARTLEY. Not suggesting anything, of course—but merely saying that if it *had* been——

EVE. I daresay. That's how they feel—they don't quite understand. Laurence always tells me I'm as free as he is. That he wouldn't blame me. And, really, I don't think he would.

BARTLEY. Well, of course, he can't love you.

EVE. Oh yes, he does, in his way. More than any of the others, I'm sure. But men like him can't really love any woman. They put them into their books, they get a great deal out of them. And I believe that's *why* he attracts women—*because* he can't love them. He always comes back—to me.

BARTLEY. And that satisfies you?

EVE. What can one do? It was very hard, at first. I found out, quite by chance.

BARTLEY. And he wouldn't give her up?

EVE. He swore that he would—but he didn't, of course. And, as I've said, there've been others, since then. And will be more. I sometimes think I'd like to have their photographs—and keep them in a special album. It would have to be quite a large one.

BARTLEY. You take it like that?

EVE. It's the best way, isn't it? Happier for the children.

BARTLEY. And you—you—though he told you you were free—you've always been content?

EVE. Oh, yes. You see, I'm different.

BARTLEY. [*With a nod.*] Yes. *You* are the—old-fashioned woman.

EVE. I'm not old-fashioned or new-fashioned—I'm just—like that.

BARTLEY. What do you mean?

EVE. [*Shaking her head.*] I don't know. But, whatever they do, or laws that they make, there'll always be some in whose life there'll be only one man. Women like me.

BARTLEY. [*Earnestly.*] Yes—I believe that. And *that's* why I want the paper to go on.

EVE. It *is* going on?

BARTLEY. Yes. He'll be editor again.

EVE. Oh, I'm glad.

BARTLEY. Just because of him?

EVE. Not only that. It does good. There are many women it helps.

BARTLEY. *I'm* going out of it, Eve. And Miriam. She has consented to give him up.

EVE. Of course.

BARTLEY. [*Grumbling.*] Oh, there wasn't so much "of course" about it. She gives *me* up too.

EVE. Does she?

BARTLEY. Yes. What do you think of that?

EVE. I don't know. I dare say she'll come back, as he does.

BARTLEY. You imagine I'll wait?

EVE. I suppose so. Yes.

BARTLEY. Well, I won't. I'll go away.

EVE. Where?

BARTLEY. Oh, anywhere. I'll go and work. Do something.

EVE. You'll come back, Bartley?

BARTLEY. Of course I'll come back to my children. But I've lost my faith, Eve. The paper shall go on —yes—because *that* wasn't what we were working for.

EVE. Yes, it was.

BARTLEY. What do you mean?

EVE. You can't make women free in one way and not in another. [*She rises.*] Well, I must go home.

BARTLEY. [*Rising with her.*] Why?

EVE. Laurence is lunching at home, and he likes me to be there. Especially when he's upset.

BARTLEY. Notwithstanding everything, notwithstanding everything, you always do what he wants?

EVE. [*Very simply.*] Oh, yes. And if I were you, Bartley, I wouldn't go away. Why should you? You can work here just as well. And the children would miss you. And Miriam loves you, you know. She has only done this because she's so clever.

BARTLEY. [*Going to the glass door with her—opening it, then suddenly stopping.*] Eve—just tell me—you *don't* think I've been wrong?

EVE. [*Very earnestly.*] Oh, no, Bartley—really I don't—not in the least!

BARTLEY. And yet you think it right that women should be free?

EVE. Oh, Bartley, it's difficult to explain. But I *do* believe that, some day, when they've *got* their freedom, they'll learn how to use it. Good-bye.

[*With a nod, she goes.* BARTLEY *closes the door, returns to the chair on which the bag is, and begins to take out the clothes. The curtain falls.*

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